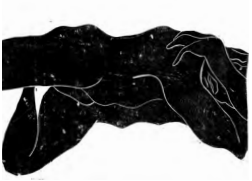
CONSPIRATIO

Spring 2023

Periodical for
Thinking After Ivan Illich



Cover Image
Woodcut by Wagner de Santana Silva

Periodical Design
Isabelle Cedotti

Guest Artists
Wagner de Santana Silva
João Paulo Marques de Lima

Editor
Sajay Samuel

Printed and crafted in Brazil

the quest for truth cannot thrive
outside the nourishment
of mutual trust

Ivan Illich

About Conspiratio

Conspiratio is neither an academic journal nor a popular magazine. Each issue of Conspiratio comprises essays, thematic articles, book reviews, and occasional translations of texts on or by Illich. All that appears in its pages typifies what Illich called "research by people", which names disciplined studies conducted by those attempting to beautify their own lives by being less dependent, in thought and deed, on the market and the state. For this reason, research by people is open to public debate and contestation. Though conducted through the medium of the written word, the periodical invokes the hoped-for intimacy of con-spiration. For an orientation, consult two essays by Illich: "Research by People" & "The Cultivation of Conspiracy".

Conspiratio encourages contributions from everyone wanting to participate in thinking after Ivan Illich. All contributions are expected to reveal a degree of familiarity with Illich's thought and to engage it in a thoughtful way. All are free to submit essays, book reviews, or translations for publication. Articles contributing to the theme of each issue should be made in response to the call for papers at www.thinkingafterivanillich.net

Conspiratio is published twice a year, in Fall and Spring. It will be available to be read online, downloaded as a pdf file, or received as a printed booklet (for a nominal printing and postage fee). To be apprised of current and forthcoming issues, please register at conspiratio@afterillich.net

CONSPIRATIO
Periodical for Thinking After Ivan Illich
Number 4 Spring 2023

Editor's letter 7

Essays

IVAN ILLICH | Toward a Post-Clerical Church 19
FÁBIO MILANA | A note to the text 30

BARBARA HALLENSLEBEN | From Hospitalization to Hospitality. On the Future of Christian Learning. A Commentary on Ivan Illich's Letter to Br. Robert Kelly SJ 32

Thematic Articles: On flesh/body

JAVIER SICILIA | The Corruption of the Resurrection of the Flesh 59

BARBARA DUDEN | The Technique that Produced the First Female Fetus 80

IVAN ILLICH | The Personal Decision in a World Dominated by Communication 98

DAVID CAYLEY | Guarding our Senses in the Age of the Show: Against the Burning Out of Hearts 111

ROBERT KUGELMANN | Learning to Feel Stress 128

SILJA SAMERSKI | Nemesis plagues Covid-19 management 153

GIOVANNA MORELLI | Ivan Illich and the Phenomenology of the Incarnation 165

BABETTE BABICH | Reading Ivan Illich on the Elemental Body 184

TOBY EVERETT | The Conspiratio of Ivan Illich and the Kiss of Peace 216

CARL MITCHAM | A Competition of Corruptions: Mediterranean Disembedding versus Asian Nihilism 259

KOSTAS HATZIKIRIAKOU | ANAKOMIDI 276

Translations

IVAN ILLICH | Doze Anos Após Nêmesis da Medicina: Um Apelo por uma História do Corpo 287

DAVID CAYLEY | A Propósito de la Vida: Carta Abierta a Jean-Pierre Dupuy y Wolfgang Palaver 296

Editor's letter

Unusually for him, Ivan Illich was not able to convey the argument he presented in *Gender* in a short lecture.[1] This failure was not because his argument was woolly-headed or mistaken. Illich understood perfectly well why *Gender* became the object of uncomprehending vitriol and why it could not be effectively summarized. As he said, "the category of the human being is such a profound certainty of post-Enlightenment thought that my claim that this is a recently engineered social reality is simply unacceptable."[2] The human being is no more questioned as a social category today than it was forty years ago, when Illich wrote *Gender*. Neither the emerging debate on AI nor the ongoing debate on the construction of gender or sexual identities puts the human into question. Just as artificial intelligence presupposes human intelligence, so also it is a human being who identifies as nonbinary.

By questioning the category of the human being, Illich was able to bring into view a historical archipelago of social arrangements from across the world. Before their erasure by successive waves of Colonization, Development, and Globalization, these social forms were heterogeneous — in one, the moon was female whereas in another the moon was male, in one the cow was sacred but a delicacy in the other. For all their differences, these distinct societies had one thing in common. In none were men and women considered to be variants of the same humankind. By giving the

1 David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (Anansi Press: Toronto, 1992). p.178.

2 *Conversation*, p.179.

Sajay Samuel, sajaysam@gmail.com
Samuel, S. Editor's Letter. Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 7-15.

name *Gender* to the fault line by which such societies were riven yet joined, Illich wanted to show that women related to men as "primarily, emotionally, conceptually, the *other*." In the mirror of this past, the conviction that men are the same as women because they are human beings is but a recent assumption. The idea that sexual and other identities are socially constructed is widely accepted today. That is not surprising. What is surprising is the continued reluctance to also accept the human being as a social construct, as a spectral frame on which identities are mounted.

"If gender existed, in the sense in which I use the term," Illich says, "there were, in popular culture, no human beings."[3] His strongest evidence for this historical proposition was patterns of tool use in pre-modern, pre-capitalist, prescientific societies. The instruments a woman wielded were forbidden to a man and vice versa. The anthropological literature he consulted overwhelmingly confirmed that tools and activities were not indifferently available to all members of a society but neatly divided between men and women. Though men and women did not do the same things or use the same tools, their activities were complementary. One planted the seed that the other harvested, one tended the granary while the other manned the fire. Whereas the male/female duality of our sexed societies presupposes the commensurating category of the human being, the man/woman duality of gendered societies implies "men as belonging to beings who behave in one way and women as those who behave in the other."[4] Accordingly, because they are different kinds of being, men and women constitute a dissymmetric though complementary pair. It was over many years of discussions with Barbara Duden, that Illich would formulate,

3 *Conversation*, p.180.

4 *Conversation*, p.180

refine, and deepen his insights into "the entirely new view of the physical, bodily existence of men and women"[5] entailed by taking the human being as self-evident.

It was a question from Norma Swenson of the Women's Health Collective in Boston — "Professor Illich: have you ever seen a human body?" — that shook Illich into the realization that the human body was an abstraction. Much of Illich's work from the 1980s until his death was devoted in one way or another to questions concerning the body and the flesh. For instance, one could argue that his thinking after *Gender* comprised two intertwined strands — one devoted to the historicity of the word and the other to matters of the flesh. The first strand is obvious in his *ABC: the alphabetization of the popular mind* and *In the Vineyard of the Text: a commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon;* the second strand weaves in and out of many of his essays that are not yet published in English.[6] In this issue of *Conspiratio*, it is questions concerning the body/flesh that give focus to the thematic articles.

Javier Sicilia is a poet and a novelist. The translation of his article does not do justice to the fluid prose and sorrowful tenor of his original text in Spanish. Sicilia insists on the distinction between body and flesh. The "brilliance of aliveness" of which Illich spoke in a different context,[7] is what Sicilia invokes with the flesh. The human body, he says, is not the flesh but rather the cultural form that flesh takes. This insight and argument allow him to do nothing less than to rethink the entire modern experience. Biopolitics was the name Michel Foucault gave to that logic of management, which since the 18th century aimed to govern populations

5 *Conversation*, p.174

6 Ivan Illich, *La Perte des Sens*, (Fayard, 2004); *La Perdita dei Sensi* (Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 2009).

7 Ivan Illich, "The Institutional construction of a new fetish: Human Life," in *In the Mirror of the Past*, (Marion Boyars, 1992). p.227.

and persons in the name of protecting and fostering life. Biopolitics seems to have nothing to do with the profiles, avatars, and fleshless bodies that populate the worlds on screens. Yet, argues Sicilia, both these and more must be understood as efforts to deny the flesh in the name of the body. The flesh of men or women is disciplined in the name of productive bodies in the factory and educable minds in the schoolroom. The bodies that sports icons and celebrities display on screens to excite their envious followers demand mortifications of the flesh. The methods of political propaganda are justified by paradoxically invoking an unsullied public mind. Sicilia then gives his remarkable insight a profound meaning. He argues that the incorruptible and amortal body of contemporary culture and politics is but a corruption of the resurrected or glorious body promised in Christian theology. The depths to which some subject themselves —whether through social distancing, plastic surgery, or transhumanist fantasies of being freed of the flesh — can only be understood, says Sicilia, as an eversion of the heights of incarnated love (*agape*) announced two millennia ago.

There is much more to discover by slowly reading Sicilia's article. It is followed by Barbara Duden's equally rich article, translated from German. Her path-breaking work on the historicity of women's bodies is evident in her two books available in English. In *Disembodying Women,* she argued that historically "the human fetus, as conceptualized today, is not a creature of God nor a natural fact, but an engineered construct of modern society." [8] The article she graciously permitted us to publish here goes much farther. After carefully specifying the object of her inquiry as the iconology of anatomical graphics, she argues that the fetus is a figment of the innova-

8 Barbara Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin* (Harvard University Press, 1991); *Disembodying Women: perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn* (Harvard University Press, 1993); p.4

tions in a-perspectival graphics supervised by Samuel Thomas Soemmerring in the late 18th century. Strictly, the fetus is unseeable. From no standpoint can a person see what they are shown through techniques of visualization. Such techniques of a-perspectival visualizations only show you, with great precision, what the designer wants you to see. Duden's argument that the fetus represents a "paradoxical combination of individuality and type" shocks us out of our complacency. She invites us to disbelieve our eyes to see clearly again. Duden presents two further arguments in her article that surprised me. The unseeable fetus, she says, "is the Archimedean point for turning to a new gender relationship." In these visual depictions, the fetus appears outside the womb, without umbilical cord or navel. Previously, a mother expected her child whose existence could not be conceived as separate or separated from hers. Now, the fetus introduces a necessary rupture between mother and child that transmogrifies them both. The multibillion-dollar surrogacy industry depends on the technogenic certainty that mothers are womb-bearing carriers of a life. Just as the free-standing fetus decisively transforms the relationship of the woman to herself, so also it transmutes the relationship between men and women. In the shadow thrown by the fetus, the dissymmetric complementarity between two genders necessarily mutates into the sexual and other differences presented by a human life. The fetus as an instance of technogenic human life elucidates not only Sicilia's distinction between the flesh and the body but also Illich's claim about the historicity of the human.

The third article in this collection is a translation of Ivan Illich's last lecture given in October 2002, in Lucca, Italy. It has taken two decades to craft a publishable English version. Illich gave his talk at the request of Aldo Zanchetta, who produced a video of the event and shared it soon after. Some years later, a transcription of Illich's Italian speech was

available. It took many hands and many viewings to get the translation right. We publish it here with the kind permission of Valentina Borremans. In this statement, Illich reaffirms his distance from all things religious. However, what he emphasizes are the dangers posed by the rising tide of information to our ability to understand the world, to think for ourselves, and to make judgments grounded in the common sense. Today, our sensual apprehension of the world and ourselves is being crowded out by meaningless data as an internet of bodies (communications between and about iatrogenic bodies) is layered on top of an internet of things (communications between things). Illich argues that this data flood washes away the ground of personal judgment, erodes the common sense by which the course of one's life takes shape and is given meaning.

Excessive exposure to information can burn out the heart, as David Cayley points out in the fourth article. Cayley was not aware of Illich's last talk when he wrote, but his article on Illich's broader reflections on the show and on language can also be read as a serendipitous commentary on it. He recalls for us a lesson from Illich. The first universities built in 12th century Europe rapidly became the loci for a division between heart and mind, the site where the intellectual pursuit of truth was separated from the ascetical-mystical pursuit of wisdom. Echoing Illich, Cayley recommends that we repair this breach by finding ways to resist and renounce the clouds of information that threaten to suffocate us.

In different ways, both Robert Kugelmann and Silja Samerski show us the ongoing consequences of ignoring the effects of the amortal human body that constitutes the core of the modern experiment. In the early 1990s, Kugelmann's book on stress as the manifestation of "engineered grief" left a lasting impression on Illich. I asked Kugelmann what he had learned about stress over the ensuing years. His article for this issue is, in part, a response to that question. He writes it is not just grief,

but rage, frustrated desires, anxiety, and fatigue that are now re-engineered as stress. The passions that roil up from living out of joint with the times are named stress. In this way, they are harnessed to programs that make us resilient, that help us adapt to and cope with the very conditions that cause them. In the encouragements to manage our stress-levels, I must think of "it" as something other than "me." Techniques of relaxation, of eating nutritionally balanced foods, of engaging in optimally calibrated exercises, and obeying exhortations to be grateful, mindful, and positive are all methods to manage the flesh in the name of the stress-free body. Paradoxically, though not surprisingly given Sicilia's argument, the prominent cultural examples of stress-free bodies are the vampire and the zombie, says Kugelmann. Accordingly, to be stress free is to adopt a "corpse-like body image", to become part of the "un-dead."

In her article, Silja Samerski emphasizes the continued importance of attentively reading Illich's *Medical Nemesis* and related essays. There was little in the mindset and the methods of management that were made manifest by the Covid-19 pandemic that Illich hadn't predicted over a quarter century ago. Only those ignorant of his warnings could have been credulously caught up in the fevered world-wide overreactions to a lethal viral infection. People readily accepted the rules and regulations promulgated to save the body from the infirmities of the flesh because they were successfully trained to mistake the iatrogenic body for the felt flesh. Even more significant to furthering this illusion, says Samerski, is the active pursuit of health. Almost thoroughly alienated from the flesh, in their desire for health, people demanded to be tagged by population level statistical indicators of health. Appropriately, Samerski quotes Illich who, in 1995, warned that "every encounter with the medical system leads to an epistemic transformation" of self-understanding.

Giovanna Morelli is an Italian philosopher and close

reader of Illich. Babette Babich is a widely published American philosopher who has included Illich in her studies on the philosophy of technology. Whereas Morelli unearths the figure of incarnation in most, if not all, of the published books and writings of Illich, Babich connects those writings to figures — of earth, water, air, and fire – that shape what she calls the elemental body in Illich's thought.

The article by Toby Everett is pitched in a slightly different key. He traces the *Conspiratio*, the mouth-to-mouth kiss of peace of which Illich spoke, over the centuries in Christian thought and practice. Through this he offers a historical corrective to a few of Illich claims. Yet, he is sympathetic to the larger point Illich makes. Everett underscores the promise of what he calls "incarnational peace," as *disruptive* of "the people's peace." Illich wrote of a people's desire to be left in peace not only in his 1980 essay.[9] He also alludes to this idea in his talk published in this volume. Everett also suggests that the incarnation "…*deepens* the people's peace." The following article by Carl Mitcham may be read as taking issue with that suggestion. In speaking of "Mediterranean disembedding", Mitcham acknowledges that the Christian message to not slavishly conform to social conventions animated the destruction of the people's peace. Given Illich's own formulation that the corruption of the best is the worst, Mitcham asks why we should attempt to recover or return to a path already proven to have disastrous consequences. Why, he asks, shouldn't we reject the very source of such disembedding and, for instance, seriously consider Buddhism as an alternative founding?

The set of thematic articles ends with a spartan poem by Kostas Hatzikiriakou. It resounds with the theme of this issue.

This issue also includes new voices, one of which is

9 Ivan Illich, "The Delinking Peace and Development" in *In the Mirror of the Past* (Marion Boyars, 1992), pp.15-26

Barbara Hallensleben from Zurich. She not only recently organized a meeting at the University of Fribourg celebrating the thought and life of Ivan Illich but has also written a commentary to the essay by Illich titled "Towards the Post clerical church" of which Fabio Milana traces the provenance. This essay was previously published in the *Ellul Forum*, a magazine worth reading for those interested in the thought of Illich. A section of its most recent issue includes essays on the pandemic from the perspective of Illich.

Given the size and heft of this issue, I have held back on book reviews but have included two translations. The first by Neto Leão and Nilo Coradini de Freitas, renders into Portuguese, Illich's essay "Twelve years after Medical Nemesis: A Plea for Body History" from *In the Mirror of the Past*. As I have previously pointed out in these pages, there are a growing number of Illich readers in Brazil, in no small measure due to the efforts of Leão and his partner Isabelle Cedotti. The second translation is only available in the online version of this issue. Hernando Calla translated into Spanish, David Cayley's "Questions about the current pandemic from the point of view of Ivan Illich", which was published in the first volume of this periodical. Calla excels at his craft and is looking for support to translate Cayley's book *Ivan Illich: an intellectual journey*.

As Carl Mitcham reminded me, 2023 is the 50th anniversary of Illich's *Tools for Conviviality*. We thought it appropriate to devote the next issue of *Conspiratio* to the question concerning tools. There is much in the air about technology — from ChatGPT to electric cars and voyages to Mars. I urge readers to send in articles on the broad topic of technology. The deadline for submissions is September 30, 2023.

Sajay Samuel
May 2023

Essays

Toward a Post-Clerical Church

by Ivan Illich

Dear Kelly,

When you dropped in on my hideout it was two in the afternoon. Now it is two in the morning. You are on your way back north, for a second semester in a course of *aggiornamento* for aging missionaries offered at a Canadian Jesuit university. I am still ruminating on the conversation we had. For myself and a couple of friends, "Kelly" already evokes two realities: the thoughtful, generous and delicate man and priest whom I was surprised to meet, and a contemporary "type" for whom I just cannot think of a more thought-provoking representative, and into which both Lee and I would want to fit.

This is not really a personal letter. It's a letter to the Kelly whom you have given us for reflection. I write it because I will not sleep peacefully before the format of a letter gives me the framework within which I can say something which has haunted many conversations during the last years. If something in this introduction sounds too personal for a letter I would like to share with others, you and I both know that the Kelly I address is a critter of my imagination.

When you called from downtown, where you somehow had gotten my number, I was sitting under the banana tree excerpting 12th-century rules of hospital communities. That's the century in which the very first houses specializing in the recovery of sick people had been established in western Christendom. Crusaders, who had been impressed by such houses in Byzantium, and who had observed the practice of medical hospitalization in Islam, brought the idea of *nosokomium*, "the sick house", to southern France. In the course of

Illich, I. Toward a Post-Clerical Church
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 19-29

only a few decades the new idea caught fire, and not just dozens but a few hundred examples of the new institution began to dot the world of the Pope.

With the idea of such a house a new kind of religious community came into existence whose members dedicated their lives in obedience, celibacy, and poverty to the care of the sick. To guide their common life, they picked up a letter addressed to pious women by the Church Father Augustine, and added a set of recommendations made at the beginning of the century by Raymond de Guy. He had founded such a house for crusaders in Jerusalem when they were too sick and tired to venture a return home. Some of these rules were for "sisters and brothers called to the hospital", healthy persons who had heard an intimate invitation to care for those marked by disease. In other early rules, the bodily mark of disease was interpreted as a divine calling to religious community life, and the healthy who joined as members found in leprosy or gangrenous ergotism a reason to live with those more visibly marked, apart from the rest of society.

I mention this at the outset of my letter because it tells you in what mood I was when you called. In conversation with Lee, I was trying to find the right sentences to make it believable to my readers that the very idea of "hospitalizing the sick under Christian care" has a beginning in history, and that half of the Christian history we know was over before it was accepted as an obvious "need" in the medieval town.

Then you walked in. What a pleasure it was to make your acquaintance! In a few minutes it was obvious that you were not only a fellow historian, but a learned one at that. First a decade of ecclesiastical studies, completed when the 19th-century routine of seminary training was still uncontested. This made you acquainted with a standard canon which – for those of us born sufficiently before World War II – gave a common culture to Catholic priests all over.

Just ordained, you went to Africa for a first "trial" without any preparation. You had to grope your way into the history and culture of the mission, trusting your basic intuitions and letting yourself be imbued by the prejudices floating around at the mission station. A dozen years followed as a missionary in tropical Africa. You were sent to care for people whose language in the meantime had changed beyond recognition, and because you did not properly record it, will not be remembered.

Next came demanding studies. As a middle-aged man, you spent several years as a graduate student at one of the world's major universities and wrote a doctoral dissertation in cultural history, based on oral testimony you had collected. And back you went for another ample decade as a white cleric in a region which had turned into a black nation, mostly "to care" for people who had little use for you. What a life! In many profound ways, a life that follows a pattern which people twenty years younger than we will have to reconstruct from biographies, because it will be beyond their grasp.

I do not know how you took the seminary fare of the post-war period with its insistence on Latin, its smattering of Thomas Aquinas for the sake of the clergy's mental insurance, its fragments of Biblical studies – just prestigious enough to discourage personal reading and totally insufficient for nourishing homilies. But one thing became clear as we sat around Valentina's table with your Central European traveling companion who works among the Basutos: The new generation, which poor John Paul brings forth from contemporary places of clerical learning – in comparison to those of our time – no longer has either canon or study habits, nor that minimum of ambiguous rootedness which came as a bonus with our experience.

What a maddening idea, that you should now be on leave from your equatorial mission station to submit to a pedagogical potpourri of curricular offerings planned to

bring you "up to date" in theology, spirituality, and pastoral care! How sad the state of the Church that, after years of isolation and intellectual starvation, lack of books and dependence on journalistic reports about Church and Faith, overwork and aging in the boondocks, she has nothing better to offer you on your sabbatical than one more return into the curricular market. This is the point at which our luncheon conversation became serious. Both of you asked questions and I gave answers by which, unwittingly, I might have shocked you.

I meant what I said. Yes, I do believe that current discussions on the future of the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church are overwhelmingly beside the point because they focus on the future of the clergy: Should there be a married clergy? Should ordination be limited to the male clergy? What place should be given to the local community – clerical and lay – when it comes to the election of a bishop or the shaping of liturgical forms? Must clerics who hold opinions divergent from the Roman tradition be removed from their posts? Not the mystery of the Trinity or of the Incarnation, but the "mystery" of the clergy now polarizes the Church. A mystifying "class struggle" has been thrashed out with such noise over the last twenty-five years that not only sophisticated Jews but even Japanese tourists have the impression that to be a Catholic means to take sides on these issues.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not one of those who denies that these are important questions on which, to a high degree, the kind of political institution which the Roman Catholic Church becomes, depends. But they are relevant only as long as you accept a hypothesis that results from a historical accident, and not from anything in Scripture or Tradition. These questions are important only as long as you live with the certainty that "the clergy" is a God-willed attribute of the community founded by Christ.

From personal experience, many conversations, and phenomenological analysis, I have come to the conviction that clergy – when mentioned in connection with the Roman Catholic Church – has at least one essential characteristic today which was absent from the essence of any church-grouping in previous epochs of Church history. This characteristic is the result of a proposed professional education, first formulated by Cardinal Pole in England (in the National Synod of 1556), which slipped almost verbatim into the 3rd session of the Council of Trent through Cardinal Morone, and whose provision was then defined as a duty incumbent on every bishop in the 23rd session of the Council. This proposal envisages the institutional formation of secular priests, something as unheard of in Latin Christendom at this time as poor houses which limit admittance exclusively to the sick had been unheard of during the 11th century. But unlike the idea of a specialized recovery of the sick – which spread like wildfire – it took several centuries before Canon Law began to define the attendance at seminaries as a prerequisite for ordination.

Perhaps these remarks will explain my deep interest in the "invention" of hospitals in the 12th century. I believe that this social creation of a new institutional device which was motivated by heroic charity and deep trust in personal divine vocation, in the course of the next half millennium transformed our perception of what a good society ought to be. We can no longer imagine a good society which would lack special institutional agencies where people with special physical or mental incapacities can be bedded, stored and treated. The need for hospitalization has become one of our basic certainties, and with it we accept as obvious that there are certain acts of charity which "just cannot be absolved by simple hospitality." I am studying not so much the history of the hospital, but the history of hospitality – now largely reduced to invitations for Christmas dinner. I argue that this degradation

of hospitality happened in good faith, in the shadow of a society built on the idea of hospitalization.

Just as there is a profound difference between a society that abandons the stranger who does not find hospitality, and a society that mediates the needs of strangers through taxation and professionalization, it should be clear that there is an essential phenomenological difference between a Church which prescinds from an institutionalized routine for the specialized preparation of its priests, and one in which formal education is seen as a prerequisite for ordination, and increasingly to be repeated for the continued exercise of priestly functions.

What I find scandalous is the cocky innocence with which a Roman western tradition that claims catholicity is bound up with the fate of a kind of clergy whose competence, status, function, and income are determined by a factor which is radically alien to the first three-quarters of the history of the Church. I write you this letter in the hope that you, or other "Kellys" who are returning in old age to service seminary retraining will help to make this point. Unless persons like you take the Church's non-clerical future into your own hands by sharing your wisdom and discipline as hosts rather than as educators, the reform of the Church will be a miracle rather than the promised marvel it has always been.

We had so little time yesterday, so I take the liberty as a colleague to remind you of the literature which supports my claim. Let me sum up: Until the Council of Trent, there were no institutions of any kind that had as their purpose the training of pastoral agents. What in retrospect is made to look like the ancestry of seminaries are historiographic phantoms invoked to justify the contemporary existence of an educational agency which, at its best, gifted those alumni it almost inevitably warped. Until the late 16th century, you became a priest the way in which you became a healer or cobbler or musician – by picking up what it takes for the task. You

picked up what you needed for your ordination as best you could get it – your Latin, your store of pious stories and your common sense – on which the bishop might test you before making you a priest. There is no evidence that the need for institutional initiation for the secular clergy has ever been felt. Certainly Canon Law – which so often is a mirror for ecclesiastical utopias – gives no sign of a desire to institutionalize preparation for the priesthood. It is only the Second Lateran Council which admonishes bishops to employ a "Magister" in each cathedral, who will be available to teach poor clerics without asking for tuition. The decree reflects both the new opportunity available for scholars to make money on their learning and the new trend to put the emerging profession under ecclesiastical control.

The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 made its wish more explicit: There should be a "theologian" who can instruct priests and others in Holy Scripture, and who is placed particularly at the service of those who are engaged in the "care of souls." The Council did not dare request that this be done by every bishop, but only that such a charge be created by archbishops at their Metropolitan Sees. It took a millennium – from the time of the Greek Fathers to the time of monastic and conventual training in early scholasticism – for a council to make a first attempt toward a separately institutionalized "learned service" for the diocesan, as opposed to the religious, clergy. Two hundred years later the first colleges were created with the explicit purpose of housing students whose intent was pastoral rather than learned and legal: Capranica and Nardini in Rome, Antonio di Siguenza (1477) in Spain. But it would be reading a non-existent category into these early Renaissance foundations to interpret a few charitable hostels – meant mostly for poor boys who were looking for a curial benefice – as forerunners of the kind of college which came to be known as a seminary.

It took the Tridentine decree on seminaries as many

centuries to be accepted by the Catholic world as it took to have all dioceses recognize the decree on the need to solemnize marriage. Most of the seminaries started in the first hundred years after the Council by the bishops themselves did not survive their first or second generation of students. The late 16th-century colleges that were run by Jesuits and later by other orders for future secular priests – as distinct from their own members – survived better, but served the formation of elite ecclesiastics rather than local pastors. In Spain it took until the late 17th and 18th century until the idea of seminary training entered the majority of dioceses. In Germany, the practice never was accepted. In France, Jean-Jacques Olier created that unique company of St. Sulpice which, after 1642, succeeded in stemming the extinction of the few remaining seminaries founded in the aftermath of Trent.

As the seminary memories of your traveling companion brought to our attention, the spirit and literature generated by this band of spiritual pedagogues still affected people born in the second quarter of this century. Over the next 300 years the Sulpicians created an unprecedented style of fervent piety which would be a fascinating subject for an unusually gifted historian of religious mentalities. Outside of Europe, and especially in Latin America, only during the 19th century did seminaries become standard equipment in the typical diocese. And at that, they were often the one place where a boy could get some classical preparation. I still remember the Puerto Rican generation of seminary alumni, most of whom became the province's lawyers or poets rather than priests.

When one discusses this background of the Church's reliance on seminary-trained clergy with churchmen or almost anyone, at least two points are immediately made. First, admiration is voiced for the seriousness with which the post-Reformation Church accepted the challenge by insuring "educational" progress, and then my interlocutor calls atten-

tion to the claim that "modern times" demand formal education. They interpret the Church's dependence on professional preparation of its staff as a consequence of a secular trend, and are blind to the evidence that this trend might just as well be interpreted as a secularization of an ecclesiastical model. They ask me if I can imagine a modern Church indifferent to the "education" of its leadership and without professional formation among the myriad of new fields that must be related to the Gospel if the Christian message is to remain relevant to the modern world. This is a point made very explicitly yesterday while we ate our rice.

My answer to both these questions is "no". Of course, I could *imagine* both, but I abstain from doing so. History is what I know has been. I need all the imagination I have to grasp what has been, something I find even more difficult when the subject is the Church. But I would like to insist on two points: First, it is the Church which has pioneered the concept that a certain amount of "education" is the prerequisite for admission to status, function, and privilege. In the process of adapting the medieval *artes* into a condition for the ordination of its priests, the idea of the curriculum took shape, and with it the basic assumptions upon which the ideology of universal education could be built.

That social topology, within which our various institutions are concrete configurations, depends on the assumption that eminence in any specialty presupposes curricular inputs rather than what you pick up. The prejudice against the informal learner which has grown during the last several hundred years is a characteristic of all our institutions, not just of the Church. But, in a unique way, the Church initiated this prejudice: with the *seminarium* —the seedbed of the next generation — it set the model for a leadership qualified by curricular consumption. The one institution which solemnly celebrates its continuity over the last two thousand years is

also that institution which pioneered a gnoseocratic bureaucracy based on certified curricular consumption, *and* the institution which claims that this kind of "knowledge"-based aristocracy is not just opportune or "natural" but the result of God's own will.

Second: Men like you, and many others I know, are in danger of *apostolic castration* due to these historical and ecclesiastical assumptions about the relationship between schooling and evangelical leadership. I purposely use the above word. After you had gone, and I tried to return to the 12th-century transmogrification of hospitality into hospitalization that was motivated by compassionate mercy. Lee, whom you met, after a long silence, quoted Matthew: "He sent them out ..." Did He not trust each of his disciples to gather with whom they met? Did He not expect, even bless, their "balls", encourage the practice of personal hospitality in men who, for his sake, had forsaken their own home?

Yes, you were right in your suspicion that twenty-five years ago I wrote that book on the deschooling of society in the hope that a secular discussion would lead to proposals for the deschooling of the Church. As far as I know, I failed. But my conviction has only deepened: The time of qualification by curricular attendance, the time of schooling which grew out of the idea of the seminary and the *ratio studiorum*, is over. Even now, higher learning depends crucially on hospitality and friendship and lifelong personal emulation in those virtues which establish the independent stance of heart and mind on which *studium* —in the age of A.I., sociobiology and the apocalypse of science —depends.

Bob, am I wrong when I feel certain that the future of Christian learning depends on how I share it with others, or you with your friends? Am I wrong when I suggest that you tell a few of your friends that next year, between two rainy seasons, you can give sack and sorgo to no more than seven;

that you have two books which you want to follow when you address them between Psalms on Monday and Wednesday; that you would like to read beforehand the books which they will comment when they speak on the other evenings?

Ivan Illich

P.S.
I do not believe that the de-clericalization of the priesthood and the de-clericalization of consecrated ascetism, at this moment, depend on the de-clericalization of learning; but rather, on the creation of *faits accomplis* here and there. Further, the unique view on the current predicament of the world which a rootedness in the Roman Catholic tradition enables us to have can be celebrated with circles of friends – by you and by Lee and by Dara (of whom I told you) and can be celebrated with a scope which is and must forever be out of the purview of those caught within the "educational assumption," be they the Pope himself.

A note to the text

This text of Illich first appeared in The Ellul Studies Forum: a Forum for Theology in a Technological Civilization *published by the University of South Florida (# 9, January 1992, pp. 14-16). The issue was entirely occupied by a dossier announced as* Ivan Illich's Theology of Technology, *collected by Carl Mitcham as guest-editor: from his introduction we learn that this text had previously been proposed to* CrossCurrents *but rejected by its editor Joseph Cunneen. Together with the present letter to Fr. Kelly, the dossier comprised the English translation titled* Health as One's Own Responsibility? No, Thank You! *(pp. 3-5) of a speech held in Germany in September 1990; and similarly translated interview granted to Eva Schindele on that occasion* Against Health, *(pp. 6-7) (both translated by Jutta Mason); the first redaction of* Posthumous Longevity *(pp. 12-14) dated* Epiphany 1989 *and written to the Benedictine community of Bethlehem, Connecticut; some commentaries by Lee Hoinacki and David B. Schwarz to the above-mentioned texts. Not having been included in the 1992 collection of Illich's speeches* In the Mirror of the Past*, these texts, some of which later appeared in the posthumous* La perte des sens *(2004), sound to our ears, in retrospect, as inaugurating a new mood in Illich's public writing.*

The Letter to Fr. Kelly stemmed from his unexpected visit to Illich in Ocotepec in the Summer of 1990. A contemporary of Illich, Robert Kelly (1925-2005) was an Irish Jesuit who in 1951 had been sent to Zambia with missionary assignments;

Fabio Milana, fa.mil@libero.it
Milana, F. A note to the text: Toward a Post-Clerical Church.
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p.30-31

*he would serve there for 54 years, performing a variety of tasks as a "white cleric" within the local Church, and would author more than a dozen books on Christian spirituality. There hadn't been any previous acquaintance between those two men before that visit in Ocotepec, as we can tell from the letter itself. We are not told why Kelly took the trouble of traveling from Canada to Mexico to meet Illich during a brief respite from his missionary work. However, we can hypothesize that he had happened to have in hand a little book by Illich on missiology, which a Catholic publishing house from the neighboring Zimbabwe released as late as in 1974 (*Mission and Midwifery. Essays on Missionary Formation*, Mambo Press, Gwelo, ZWE) and which would be considerably influential in Christian Africa for at least a couple of decades.*

The circumstance that Illich felt it necessary to put in writing the core theme of this encounter the very following night and to complete it within a few weeks (the final draft is dated October 27, 1990), as well as his attempt to rather quickly to publish the letter (or maybe just his agreement to the prospect of doing so) in a well distributed Catholic journal before steering it toward the Ellul Forum*, can be related to a personal constellation of contemporaneous facts. In 1991 it was the fortieth anniversary of Illich's (and, see the case, also Kelly's) priestly ordination. Already, the year before, he had been contacted by a former fellow seminarian, bishop Giulio Augusto Salimei (Rome), to celebrate Mass anew together with his old colleagues. Reflections and clarifications would follow between the two friends, and reasonably, also between Ivan and himself. In August 1991, Illich would write to Salimei to decline his proposal.*

Fabio Milana
April, 2023

From Hospitalization to Hospitality. On the Future of Christian Learning

A Commentary on Ivan Illich's Letter to Br. Robert Kelly SJ

by Barbara Hallensleben

No doubt there would be more attractive titles for a commentary on Ivan Illich's letter to Fr Robert Kelly SJ. Why not "De-clericalization of the Church" or "A Manifesto Against Gnoseocratic Bureaucracy"? The correlation of the words "hospitalization" and "hospitality" seems at first sight to result from coincidental circumstances, but in the end, it turns out to be a quite suitable conceptual framework for what concerns Ivan Illich in his entire letter. Only once in the letter does Illich mention "learning" in reference to the clergy. However, the last paragraphs move almost abruptly to this question. Formulated as a thesis, "The future of Christian learning depends on how I share it with others." "Christian learning" here obviously means, learning to be a Christian – within a Christian learning community.

The "learning" that Ivan Illich propagates differs in fundamental ways from the "learning" that he radically criticizes in the letter to Fr. Kelly: the institutionalized transmission of knowledge on the "curricular market", the classification into teachers and learners, who are thus subordinated, disciplined, and uniformed, the "curricular consumption" that entrenches an imbalance of power because it presupposes and produces a "gnoseocratic bureaucracy".[1] This is accompanied by the devaluation of learning that is acquired through sharing in a learning community.

1 Quotations without reference refer to the letter of Ivan Illich, see p. 19-29

Barbara Hallensleben, barbara.hallensleben@unifr.ch
Hallensleben, B. From Hospitalization to Hospitality. On the Future of Christian Learning A Commentary on Ivan Illich's Letter to Br. Robert Kelly SJ.Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p.32-51

1. Attempt of Retrieving Fr. Kelly's Honor

Before we go into more detail on the criticisms and alternative proposals of Ivan Illich, I would like to say a word in honor of Fr. Robert Kelly SJ. We know from the introduction of Fabio Milana that he is a contemporary of Ivan Illich, presumably ordained in the same year. Ivan Illich himself speaks, as it were, of "two Kellys": of the "thoughtful, generous and delicate man and priest" who took the initiative and made much effort to visit Ivan Illich – and of the "contemporary type" that Illich also calls "a critter of my imagination". The real person, Robert Kelly SJ, deserved a more detailed study that cannot be undertaken here. Easily accessible are the "Homily for Bob Kelly's Funeral Mass" delivered by his confrere Fr Joe Keaney SJ at St Ignatius Church in Lusaka on 11th March 2005, and an obituary on the website of the Irish Jesuit Province, written in 2014 by Fr Charlie Searson SJ.[2]

The Jesuit we come to know in this way could well be described as a man and priest after the heart of Ivan Illich. Even if one follows the words *de mortuis nihil nisi bene*, the insights into Fr. Kelly's personality, written not formally but warmly, paint the very individual picture of a man who by no means conformed to the institutional frameworks of responsibility and behavior. From 1951 until his death, i.e., for 54 years, he served as a missionary in Zambia, previously Northern Rhodesia. Despite prolonged infirmity and illness, Fr Kelly did not leave his chosen new home even to die. He loved school teaching and pastoral care, so that it became a renunciation for him when, with a mandate from the bishops of Zambia, he became head of the campaign against excessive drinking. In a country 12 times the size of Ireland, he visited every diocese regularly for 17 years. He also became known

2 Cf. https://www.iji.ie/2014/12/02/irish-men-behind-the-missions-bob-kelly-sj/, and http://www.eprodoffice.com/bob/obituary.htm; the following quotations are taken from these documents.

for his "popular books on spirituality." Whatever colonial-paternalistic traits they may contain, they grew, matured, and were appreciated under the African sun.

The preacher of his funeral mass does not hide the darknesses of Bob's soul: repeated and prolonged periods of depression exacerbated by an increasing physical deterioration. Perhaps this personal vulnerability opened his heart to the obvious and hidden sufferings of the people around him, who apparently appreciated and loved to visit him well into his old age. "He had no tolerance whatsoever for legalism, for pettiness, for narrow-minded people".

What the parable of the Good Samaritan was for Ivan Illich, "the Story of the Prodigal Son" was for Robert Kelly. "One of the first times I heard him preach on the parable he asked the question, 'What comes right after the part where the Father sees the boy while he was still a long way off?' Hands went up and the popular answer was, 'He ran to meet the boy'. Bob pointed out five important words in between 'He was moved with pity'." The preacher adds: "I was brought up thinking that holiness was to do with the number of hours one spent in front of the Blessed Sacrament or how hard one knees got from praying. Now I think it is much more to do with compassion. Having sympathy and empathy. Feeling for and feeling with. Be holy, as your Father is holy. Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Bob was that kind of holy man". What more can "Christian learning" produce in the life of a priest and missionary?

What would Ivan Illich have said about the real Robert Kelly at his funeral? In any case, let us read the text "Dear Kelly" not as a letter to Bob, the Jesuit who matured in his own life and was led to missionary poverty, but as another reckoning with the "type", the "pattern" that Ivan Illich recognized or thinks he has recognized in him.

2. The Purpose: The Mystery of God Incarnate in the Mystery of the Church

What deeply inspires Ivan Illich in his text remains largely unspoken. However, it is sufficiently clearly implied to name it and to recognize it in the other writings he addressed to fellow Christians: It is the "mystery of faith," which is profoundly "the mystery of the Triune God or the Incarnation." In contrast, the struggle against clericalization, against schooling, against bureaucracy, which seems dominant in the text, is not his main purpose. Rather, Illich desires to open the gaze to what needs to be disclosed in this struggle: the newness of Christianity. "I believe that the Incarnation makes possible a surprising and wholly new flowering of love and knowledge. For Christians the Biblical God can now be loved in the flesh."[3] This mystery can not only be an institutional witness as doctrine of the Church; it comes into being in the learning community of faith and does not stop at the visible boundaries of the Church.

Ivan Illich speaks discreetly because he does not want to institutionalize the mystery himself. He has no doctrinal answer to the question, "How do we pass on Christianity?" Rather, he speaks of what the church is not: neither "a godlike Byzantine court" nor a "medieval feudal system of fiefs"; it cannot take refuge in the invisible church of Protestant vision, nor the drastic visibility of new political forms, even "in the form of a service institution".[4] So what remains? It is the *casta meretrix*, the "chaste harlot," which Illich learned about as the teaching of the Church Fathers through reading Hans Urs von Balthasar's extensive article[5] and which he loves and confesses

3 *The Rivers North of the Future*, ed. David Cayley, Anansi Press: Toronto 2005, 47.

4 *The Powerless Church* (2018), 162.

5 In: *Sponsa Verbi*, Johannes Verlag: Einsiedeln 1971, 203-305; quoted: Ibid. 161

as his mother.[6] The recognition of his main purpose can avoid us from mistakenly thinking of Ivan Illich primarily as a social critic.

3. Diagnosis: clericalization, gnoseocratic bureaucracy

a. Illich's Diagnosis: The few pages of the letter gather variations on the theme that preoccupies Ivan Illich throughout: the perversion of the gospel through its institutionalization. It could also be called a darkening of the mystery or a destruction of the Christian learning community. This diagnosis is exemplified by various paths and aberrations of Christian learning.

Shortly before Fr. Kelly's unexpected visit, Illich tried to reconstruct the emergence of nursing orders since the 12th century based on the "rules of hospital communities". This coincidental fact will become a symbolic reference for the rest of the letter. As usual, he works in accordance with his historical training through a careful study of sources. Due to an error in the transcription of the manuscript or an inattention, the printed text mentions the name "Raymond de Guy", while obviously he deals with Raymond du Puy (1083-1158/60), the second Grand Master of the Order of Saint John. The latter created a new tradition by establishing a hospital for crusaders near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and extended the care of the sick to their military protectors. The main thesis is more broadly elaborated by Ivan Illich in "Medical Nemesis" (1975): Hospitals make people sick. They divide humans into the healthy and the sick, the sovereign and the dependent, the normal and the deformed. They segregate the sick "from the rest of society" and hierarchize the relationship to their caregivers. Ivan Illich bears the sensitivity to these is-

6 As William T. Cavanaugh says, the Church can only celebrate her mystery in the sacrament and live it in the form of penance. *Migrations of the Holy,* Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.

sues in his own body: disfigured by a rampant tumor on his face, he nevertheless refused treatment by medically trained experts.

A second part of the diagnosis relates to the example of Fr. Kelly. The pastoral terminology of "care for people" from a position of a missionary, corresponds to the logic of medical care transferred to the soul. Illich follows the reasoning he tirelessly used against the crowd of enthusiastic North American short-term missionaries: In well-meaning selflessness, they come, after all, as ambassadors of North American lifestyles and economic interests to people "who had little use for you" – without seeing themselves as learners and receivers. The criticism here is not so much directed at Fr. Kelly as at those who are responsible for his education and especially his "continuing formation": "How sad is the state of the church when, after years of isolation and intellectual starvation, lack of books and dependence on journalistic accounts of church and faith, overwork and aging in the wilderness, it has nothing better to offer you in your sabbatical time than a renewed return to the curriculum market." R. Kelly appears here as a victim rather than a perpetrator.

After this "prelude," the main part of the text analyzes the emergence of the Church's "professional education" for the priesthood in seminaries. In its institutionalization, albeit several centuries later, Illich sees a parallel to the emergence of almshouses and hospitals since the Middle Ages. The seminary is a kind of hospital for priests and missionaries. The image is also used in the early period of the Jesuit Order by Jeronimo Nadal who calls the colleges *hospitalia spiritualia*[7], which the Jesuit must leave when they have fulfilled their purpose – in order not to withdraw unnecessarily from the practice of the mission.

7 MHSI 90, 55.

As usual, Illich's brief explanations are based on broad historical studies. He rightly traces the origin of the seminaries to the Council of Trent. The appearance of Protestant preachers and their radical criticism of the church increasingly shifted the emphasis to "right doctrine," which had to be appropriated through obedience to the Magisterium and theological studies. "Until the late 16th century, you became a priest the way in which you became a healer or cobbler or musician – by picking up what it takes for the task." Of course, Illich does not ignore the historical circumstances that suggested such a new education. He attributes a special position to the educational efforts of the Jesuits insofar as they were concerned with the "training of elites," not with the compulsory schooling of all parish priests. His criticism is directed against the circumstances, consisting of a growing "tendency to put the emerging profession under ecclesiastical control". He questions the "cocky innocence" of a church that binds its fate to a clergy which is not required by the Gospel, but whose "competence, status, function and income are determined by a factor which is radically alien to the first three quarters of the history of the Church", and even more alien to the contemporary world. Indirectly, we learn of Fr. Kelly's counterarguments, primarily through reference to the inevitable "professionalization" of "modern times." This argument gives rise to Illich's reversal of perspective: the "secular trends" should be seen as a consequence rather than a cause of ecclesiastical bureaucratization. The renowned historian Wolfgang Reinhard agrees with Illich: In his view, the church reform instigated by the Council of Trent was accompanied by socio-historical changes. It is not only an internal church measure, but an administrative reform with typical early modern features; in this respect it is

> structurally related to measures of early absolutism. The power over the faithful as subjects is clearly concentrated

> with the parish priest and the bishop. The theologically controversial but administratively consistent Council decree 'Tametsi' allows for the first time a complete control of marriages. The various types of registers that must be kept in the future record in principle the ecclesiastical life of all parishioners completely – a simple and effective kind of written administration. Through synods and visitations, a flood of regulations rains down on the clergyman for all the details of his official conduct. If his training shows gaps, he soon has at his disposal manuals for various sides of the pastoral profession. In short, the Catholic Church, which had already served as a model for secular administration, is gaining new modernity through bureaucratization.[8]

The German language has taken up this trend even more than other languages, which use the terminology of service (ministry) for the ordained representatives of the Church, while in German the word "Amtsträger" prevails, in which the canonical term of the ecclesiastical *officium* is remotely heard, but even more the structural parallel to modern "clerks" in a bureaucratic system.

b. Extended diagnosis: Ivan Illich's diagnosis finds confirmation and extension in the comprehensive commentaries by Peter Hünermann on the genesis of the "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests" *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (7.12.1965) as well as on the "Decree on Priestly Training" *Optatam Totius* (28.10.1965) of Vatican Council II.[9] The very duplication of the decrees shows that the renewal of the ecclesiastical ministry is essentially made dependent on a renewal of the

8 Wolfgang Reinhard, Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters: *ARG* 68 (1977) 226-252, p. 234-5.

9 Herders *Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen* Konzil, Vol. 3 (2005) 315-489 (quoted as OT + page) and Vol. 4 (2005) 337-580 (quoted as PO + page).

corresponding formation. The Decree on formation was even the first to be adopted.

With many historical details, the commentaries highlight the same basic features that Illich emphasized. Peter Hünermann also sees an interaction between the crisis of faith itself and the crisis of clergy: "The two phenomena are indissolubly linked. The crisis of presbyteral ministry, however, is more clearly tangible compared to the crisis of faith of the church, because it is an institutionalized quantity that is much more accessible to empirical recording than a general ecclesial crisis of faith" (PO 343). The related temptation to correct symptoms rather than deal with the root of the problem is evident. The result of the ecclesial modernization is an "ecclesiastical civil service structure of the clergy" (PO 348), brought about in the context of ecclesiastical efforts from the 19th century onward to affirm the independence of the church from state authorities through its own governance structures. In this context, priestly education, in particular, was conceived in "intensive demarcation from the secular modern circumstances of life" (OT 333) and frequently linked to the struggle against so-called "modernism." Thus, the other-worldly and supernatural image of a pure and holy priest was solidified: "Between a priest and an ordinary righteous person there should be a difference like between heaven and earth" (Pope Pius X., quoted: OT 338). The excessive demands by this ideal and the disastrous forms of hidden compensation have intensified today to the extent that the priest's form of life is no longer embedded in and supported by social, or even ecclesiastical, forms of community. Against this background, the "wave of laicizations" (PO 344) after Vatican II is not to be seen as a lack of fidelity to the vocation, but rather as an outbreak from an inherently contradictory system.

With this development, a "diocesan clergy", ruled and controlled by bishops, found its origin.[10] As a consequence, an "increased immaturity of the Christian laity" took place (PO 348-9). The centralized regimentation of seminary education produced "a universal, monolithic concept of the Latin Church" (OT 333) that pushed uniformity right into the rhythm of the seminarians' lives and into the control of textbooks. "This centrally controlled education is not only being imposed in the emerging industrialized nations of Europe and North America. Rather, it is being urged with vigor in the other continents and missions in Africa, Asia, or Latin America" (OT 333). The special characteristics and needs of local churches were not sufficiently considered. Ivan Illich was already confronted with the "products" of this standard education as a young priest in a New York parish with a Puerto Rican population, and even more so later in Mexico. He discovered and criticized this "pattern" in Fr. Kelly. Illich experienced how this system proved increasingly incapable of carrying out the transmission of faith through administrative clerical acts. The "learning community" propagated by Ivan Illich had become a one-way street of hierarchical transfer of salvation.

A significant indicator of the Council's will to reform lies in the programmatic transition from the term "priest" to "presbyter," as already evident in the title of *Presbyterorum ordinis*. Instead of emphasizing the cultic authority of the priest in categories of an objective, supernatural efficiency, "the concept of presbyter goes back to the basic experience in early cultures that the elders (men or women) knew how to tell the ancient stories that expressed the identity of a culture in terms of experience and condensed it atmospherically" (PO 414; Ottmar Fuchs). The term was also used in the Jewish syna-

10 PO 348; cf. Erwin Gatz, *Der Diözesanklerus*, Freiburg i.Br. et al. 1994, especially 39-57.

gogue communities and was adopted into the Jewish Christian communities. The *presbyter* corresponds far more to the image conveyed by Illich of a Christian who has matured in faith, who shares his experiences with others in a Christian community, and who receives ordination for the sacramental services required therein – which Ivan Illich did not consider superfluous but presupposed.

Ivan Illich knew the reform efforts firsthand. So, he also knew that though they were formally accepted they were not fully implemented in the aftermath of the Council. Already in purely linguistic terms, the change from "priest" to "presbyter" did not happen. Indeed, a reverse dynamic can be observed: The "sacerdotal" terminology gained primacy again, paradoxically because of the effort to renew the diaconal dimension of the ministry. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, n. 29, "the diaconate is restored as a distinct and permanent level of the hierarchy." In the same context, the Council introduces a distinction which was subsequently also established in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" and in canon law:

> At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed 'not unto the *sacerdotium*, but unto a ministry of service.' For strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and presbyterate they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God.[11]

Now there is even a hierarchization within the sacrament of ordination between "higher" and "lower" levels. Priests and bishops are associated under the generic term "sacerdotium".

11 Even the official English translation on the website of the Vatican uses "priesthood" instead of "sacerdotium" and "group of priests" instead of "presbyterate": https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

The confusion, especially in translations, is great and nearly insurmountable because there is no generally recognized theological terminology. Even in theological literature "sacerdotal" is often translated as "priestly", whereas it should actually mean: "pertaining to bishops and priests (as distinct from deacons)". Instead of giving the whole "clergy" a "diaconal" character, the opposite happens: there is a new "sacerdotalization" of the sacrament of ordination. The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the development, giving to this innovation a supposedly permanent and unchanging character:

> Catholic doctrine, expressed in the liturgy, the Magisterium, and the constant practice of the Church, recognizes that there are two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the episcopacy and the presbyterate. The diaconate is intended to help and serve them. For this reason, the term *sacerdos* in current usage denotes bishops and priests but not deacons. Yet Catholic doctrine teaches that the degrees of sacerdotal participation (episcopate and presbyterate) and the degree of service (diaconate) are all three conferred by a sacramental act called 'ordination,' that is, by the sacrament of Holy Orders (CCC 1554).

The degradation of the diaconal ministry continues in that, according to the Catechism, deacons serve bishops and priests, while, according to the Council, they serve the People of God together "with the bishop and his presbyterate" in all dimensions of ecclesial life: through service to the liturgy, the Word and in charity (LG 29). In this sense, the development of the diaconate can be seen as key to today's reform of ecclesial ministries, or to put it more clearly: as a way to de-clericalization.

4. Therapy: Hospitality

According to his own perception, Ivan Illich must be cautious in the transition from diagnosis to therapy. We know his leitmotifs, which are central and explained in other works: Conviviality, friendship, celebration. These echo in the letter to Br. Kelly, but the focus is on hospitality as a learning community.

The mystery of faith, to which he wants to give central attention, cannot be taught in a doctrinal way. He himself struggles with this difficulty in his fascinating contribution "Aesthetic and Religious Experience." The first part, given as a lecture in 1966 in the context of a conference of the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis", offers a general sense of the "mystical experience" in its basic features, beyond all cultures and religions. The mystical experience corresponding to the mystery "can be hoped for patiently, but it cannot be produced nor obtained. Furthermore, it cannot be known whether it will happen or not, let alone when it will happen".[12] Exercises of prayer, renunciation, and concentration can only dispose one for it, though a constant distinction from pseudo-mystical experiences remains necessary. In the second part Illich turns to the explicit Christian faith, presenting it based on the Gospels as the message of the dawned kingdom of God, which – as usual for Illich – is described by the parable of the Good Samaritan as the kingdom of love and is presented in analogy to the general mystical experience. Readers who share the Christian confession will, in particular, sense how Illich struggles for words and prefers indicating a way:

> The individual can attain faith only through the Church. 'Church' here relates to a community of believers [...] it is not a community of concepts, images or symbols, but the fraternal identification with the form-of-life of a brother

12 The Powerless Church (2018) 73.

> and whose expression is 'the kingdom' […] Historically, Jesus did so. And today I cannot do this but by means of communion of faith and messianic hope of a fraternal community.[13]

The perspective from the letter to Kelly is quite concrete. Being Christian is the fruit of a learning community between brothers and sisters. It happens through "appropriation" in shared life. This form-of-life gives access to the love of the incarnate God, the experience of the mystery, which is celebrated in the sacraments, so that it can be rediscovered as an everyday experience of the kingdom even in the garbage dumps of slums. The inconspicuous word "to pick up," which can be used for quite incidental everyday discoveries, becomes a motto in Illich's letter to Fr. Kelly: Pick up what is before your eyes, even before your feet. In "Christian learning" the depth of what is constantly happening in "human learning" is revealed – before it was deprived of its mystery by institutionalized schooling.

A key word in Illich for his alternative is "hospitality." He argues for "hospitality" instead of "hospitalization." While we tend to point out "that there are certain acts of charity that 'cannot be done simply by plain hospitality,'" Illich favors the opposite perspective: Would there not be countless acts of charity that could be done more effectively and humanely by hospitality than by specialized institutions that lead to segregation from the life of the community? Another Bob – Robert J. Fox - reinforced Illich's position. When asked by Illich what he had learned in his training as a social worker, this Bob replied, "I have figured out how orphans are made".[14] Contrary to plans to build new orphanages, Illich points to the centuries-old tradition in Puerto Rico of taking in as "godsends

13 Ibid. 87.

14 Ibid. 169.

(hijos de crianza)" those who had been made homeless for any reason, be it hurricane or migration. He is not wrong in his observation that hospitality today is "largely reduced to invitations to Christmas dinner". Being host and not educator – this is what Illich would like to see as the hallmark of a non-clerical church, but also of every kind of learning:

> Even today, higher education depends crucially on hospitality and friendship and lifelong personal practice in those virtues that ground the independent attitude of heart and mind on which 'study' depends in the age of artificial intelligence, sociobiology, and the apocalypse of science.

"Hospitality and Pain" had already been Ivan Illich's topic for a lecture in Chicago in 1987, at the invitation of David Ramage of McCormick Theological Seminary.[15] Here Illich traces in detail the "history of hospitality, Greek, Hebrew and Christian" (2). "Hospitality extends to equals" (10). Yet paradoxically, through their vocation to follow Christ, Christians lose the traditional capacity for hospitality that characterizes antiquity: The Christian "is homeless, and his lifestyle too is 'inhospitable' in the mode of hospitality flowering under the aegis of Zeus. [...] He is called to recognize that instead of hospitality he can give himself. By vocation, then, the Christian is unsettled and homeless, equally with his ancestor a pilgrim. He is called to live like Jesus, his brother, who has no place to lay his head, but who gives of himself bodily to the point of death on the cross" (6). Even more than their house, Christians open their hearts to brothers and sisters as "equals"

15 Accessible online: https://chamberscreek.net/library/illich/hospitality.pdf; quotations indicate the page number of this paper. Illich refers to several historical studies and specially recommends the reading of Hélène Pétré, *Étude sur le vocabulaire latin de la charité chrétienne*, Louvain 1948.

in following Christ, and this community is called "church".

An abysmal ambivalence opens up here: on the one hand, "compassion" in its deepest sense leads to the stigmata of St. Francis, who bears the wounds of Christ on his own body. Compassion as hospitality could be transformed precisely by its excess into the hospitalization as "charge of care" (9). Even more: the "management of pain" in the form of "heroic mercy" began at the same time to bring forth the "techniques of inflicting pain" in the form of torture. "Compassion and torture are in no way mutual cause and effect. But they both witness to a unique embodiment of the self that emerges only in western cultures." Illich concludes: "The history of pity, of mercy, of compassion, as well as of hospitalization, medicalization and ever more subtle forms of torture makes me certain that the West – its origins and culture – cannot be understood without looking attentively at the pursuit of glory and the depths of horror which, in their extremes, lie far outside the amplitudes that Plato, or even Job, could perceive" (17).

Ivan Illich's proposals are not recipes that guarantee success through application, but signposts to a mystery. Access to it does not depend on the number of guests, but on a shared openness to this mysterious presence of God in our flesh: Where it is lacking, "the reform of the Church becomes a miracle rather than as wonderful as it has always been". The transformation of hospitality into hospitalization put the church in danger of "apostolic castration", so that it is no longer able to transmit faith. Only the new transformation of "hospitalization into hospitality" can therefore give back to the Church its missionary power that Jesus entrusted to his disciples: "Did he not trust each of his disciples to gather with those whom they met? Did he not […] encourage personal hospitality to those who had left their own homes for his sake?"

Yes, church reform requires de-clericalization. But far more important is the practice of a new attitude, which Il-

lich characterizes here as hospitality. It is the inner form of a Christian learning community that has abandoned the hierarchical divide between a "teaching" and a "listening" church in favor of listening together to the Word of God and turning to the incarnate God in brothers and sisters.

A final clue follows in the last paragraph of the letter, which begins by addressing "Bob" again. It almost sounds like a return to the concrete person to whom Ivan Illich has offered hospitality, while at the beginning he addresses "Fr. Kelly" and the "Kelly of his imagination." Indeed, the last paragraph is about the inevitably concrete practice. As Ivan Illich tirelessly points out, faith does address the sick of the world to be cared for and hospitalized, but the one who has fallen among the robbers, whom I meet here and now by the wayside of my path. Hospitality is concrete – and thus it is finite and limited: I might provide food for seven people, not seven hundred. Two books I can read and take to heart, so that they become a stimulus for faith and prayer. With Lee, Bob and Dara I can celebrate among friends, not with "humankind."

A simple rule follows: Create facts! As banal as this instruction in the P.S. of the letter may be, it carries the whole weight of Ivan Illich's theological reflections. God has "created facts." He has become flesh: *Verbum caro factum est* (John 1:14). This expression often has the connotation of impatience or even disobedience to rules that should have been followed. To "present someone with a fait accompli" tends to be seen as an unkind snub. For Ivan Illich, a *fait accompli* apparently is an action that gives flesh to Christian faith through attention in love, through the celebration of the mystery. For those who are caught up in the logic of "hospitalization," this approach can indeed seem snubbing. "For God's sake", Ivan Illich here is ready to snub the Pope himself, if necessary.

5. In the school of faith: The Christian Learning Community

Ivan Illich does not abandon us with his few hints in his letter to Fr. Kelly. He entrusts the necessary next steps to the creativity of his readers because there is no other way. The "facts accomplished" have to take place in the context of those who are concerned. The emerging program of church reform is more modest and more demanding than would be the striking call for "de-clericalization." In essence, his proposal to turn to "Christian learning" goes back to the early days of Christianity. In a phase in which, on the one hand, Christian faith had found its institutional support after a period of persecution in the Roman Empire, and at the same time the migration of peoples was uprooting and unsettling whole peoples, the monastic father Benedict founded his monasteries as "schools of faith," as learning and living communities in which the mystery of the Triune God and the Incarnation could be "picked up" in the daily routine of praying and working together. Rule and form-of-life coincide in the Benedictine tradition. Already the prologue of the Rule constantly urges the practice of faith in action, culminating in the invitation:

> Therefore we must establish a school for the Lord's service. In drawing it up, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. But if something a little difficult, suggested by a reasonable balance, may be introduced in order to amend faults and to safeguard charity. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the onset. But as we advance in the monastic virtue and in faith, the heart expands, and we will run the path of God's commandments in the inexpressible sweetness of love. So never departing from the teachings of God, and

> faithfully observing his doctrine in the monastery with perseverance until death, we shall share in the sufferings of Christ, so that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen.

The emphasis is not on hierarchy among the monks, but on learning together from Christ. It is not by chance that hospitality is one of the central characteristics of the Benedictine tradition: "All guests who come to the monastery are received like Christ" (53rd chapter), that is, with the love of the Incarnate God emphasized by Ivan Illich.

Today, to speak with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we are "thrown back to the beginnings of understanding," and this understanding can only take the form of the concrete, humble form of learning communities in faith. Disciples of Jesus are "pupils", and none of them is to be called "teacher," because "only one is your teacher, Christ" (Mt 23:10). By this essential reference, all the structuring elements of the Christian learning community are kept in mutual humility.

For whom the perspectives outlined in the letter to Fr. Kelly are not concrete enough, there will be rich material in Ivan Illich's contribution, "The Vanishing Clergyman," which, not coincidentally, sees the Christian learning community growing from *diakonia*. Without using appeals like "should" or "must," Ivan Illich speaks in the affirmative prophetic future tense:

> The 'diaconia' will supplant the parish as the fundamental institutional unit in the Church. The periodic meeting of friends will replace the Sunday assembly of strangers. A self-supporting dentist, factory worker, professor, rather than a church-employed scribe or functionary, will preside over the meeting. The minister will be a man mature in Christian wisdom through his lifelong participation in an intimate liturgy, rather than a seminary graduate

> formed professionally through 'theological' formulae. Marriage and the education of growing children, rather than the acceptance of celibacy as a legal condition for ordination, will confer responsible leadership on him" I foresee the face-to-face meeting of families around a table, rather than the impersonal attendance of a crowd around an altar. Celebration will sanctify the dining room, rather than consecrated buildings, the ceremony …[16]

As the focus is on Christian learning, let us finish with his following remarks about Christian learning, leading us back to primary concern of the divine mystery within the life of the Church:

> Personal maturity, theological precision, contemplative prayer and heroic charity are not specifically Christian. Atheists can be mature; non-Catholics theologically precise; Buddhists, mystics, and pagans heroically generous. The specific result of Christian education is the *sensus ecclesiae*, 'the sense of the Church.' […] This 'sense' is the result of reading the sources of authentic Christian tradition, of participation in the prayerful celebration of the liturgy, of a distinct way of life. It is the fruit of experiencing Christ and the measure of prayer's real depth.[17]

Is Ivan Illich right? We will never know unless we embrace his invitation to hospitality.

16 *The Powerless Church* (2018) 109.

17 Ibid. 117.

Thematic Articles

On flesh/body

Wagner de Santana Silva
Untitled, Woodcut, 2023
68 x 60 cm

Wagner de Santana Silva
Untitled, Woodcut, 2023
70 x 34 cm

Wagner de Santana Silva
Untitled, Woodcut, 2023
71 x 25 cm

The Corruption of the Resurrection of the Flesh*

by Javier Sicilia

The Covid-19 emergency negated what the Gospel brought to the world which was the word that God, by incarnating himself, made the human being sacred in his carnality: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did to one of the least of my brethren, you did to me."[1] For the first time in two thousand years of Christianity, the flesh where God dwells, our *sarx*[2] – that by which we perceive ourselves and the world and we mistake for the body, which is only a form of the flesh[3] – was par-

* Neto Leão and Samar Farage did the hard work to translate this text. I take responsibility for what mistakes remain (Ed).

1 Mt. 25; 40.

2 Unfortunately, in Spanish there is only one term to talk about flesh (*carne*). Its excessive relationship with dead meat destined for food makes us lose sight of the meaning that *sarx* has in Greek, that which constitutes every living being, contrary to *trófimo*, the meat that nourishes; which in French is equivalent to *chair*, different from *viande* and in English to *flesh*, different from *meat*.

3 Flesh, understood as *sarx*, is not, as we usually think, the body – a pure body, like a stone, Heidegger says, no matter how close it is to something, it will never know it is. The body in every living being is the form of flesh. Through the body, the flesh not only expresses itself, it also experiences pure bodies or the flesh of other bodies. What defines it is not, therefore, the body, but the perception, the sensation. Thanks, moreover, to the tongue and to the word that are in the flesh, which are also flesh, the human being understands and deepens what he experiences; we are flesh that knows what knows. For this reason, as flesh, we do not apprehend ourselves as bodies, that is, we do not look at or listen to ourselves as we do with the bodies in which other flesh or pure bodies manifest themselves before us. We perceive ourselves and, at the same time that we do so, we also perceive what those bodies that are outside of us provoke in our flesh – cold, heat, fear, pain, joy, love, desire, tenderness, etc. Hence, for example, the strangeness that looking at ourselves in a mirror, in a photograph or in a video, or listening to our recorded voice on a recorder generally causes us. What we see and hear about ourselves in these artifacts – our flesh expressed in its corporeality – does not correspond to the perception we have of ourselves. We are alive, we feel alive through and in our flesh. The flesh is thus the intangible in the tangible, the invisible in the visible of the body; it is what fundamentally defines all living beings

Javier Sicilia, javiersiciliaz@gmail.com
Sicilia, J. The Corruption of the Resurrection of the Flesh. Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 59-79

adoxically regarded as an evil in the most catholic or universal sense of the term.

In ancient times, evil was focused on the diseased flesh of the leper or on beings that came from outside — the *xenoi* (foreigners in ancient Greece) or the *barbaroi* (barbarians in imperial Rome) — or, in societies in a state of crisis due to an epidemic or widespread violence on those alien to the "normality" of the social or political body. As René Girard's entire work shows, these beings contaminated everything and had to be separated, distanced, and even killed, to heal the social body. However, with the appearance of Covid-19, everyone's flesh —redeemed by the Gospel — became, almost overnight, the receptacle and transmitter of evil. Medical discourse, which holds preeminence in the social imaginary to combat the transmissibility of the virus, established this perception and promoted a way of relating that dispensed with carnal contact as much as possible. Transformed into a source of contagion, our relationships with others began to be mediated by distance. To accentuate the contaminating nature of physical contact, medical discourse specified this physical distance as one and a half meters and further categorized as "healthy" – compulsive hand washing and the use of technical devices — antibacterial gel, face masks, plastic masks, goggles, gloves. It was a matter of isolating ourselves, of escaping the air given off not only by the flesh of the other but also by the world that the flesh inhabits and in which it flourishes. Everything outside the home was contaminated and cursed by the invisible presence of a virus that represented evil.

as pure life, as *zoe*, and not as *bios* – life organized in a culture. Everything that lives, that is, everything that has life, is first of all *sarx*. See in relation to flesh the splendid phenomenological study by Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2015.

Given this perception it is not strange that the computer, the cell phone, and related digital devices became central to the implementation of the logic of isolation. Through the ascepsis of those luminous screens, we could keep close from afar; we could pretend that we continued to see, hear, and relate to others as we once did. Our encounters were forcibly displayed in public on a screen to avoid the personal presence of the other, who was now transformed into an existential threat. We were thereby abandoned to devices which medical discourse deemed absolutely essential to preserve us from evil. Erased in their carnality by Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram..., those we love or work with appear devoid of any flesh. Before our sanitized eyes and ears, they are transformed into a corpus of electrical signals: a weird ectoplasm, a trace of voice, or of writing, an unthinkable and strange resurrection on a lit screen — something that was unimaginable less than a hundred years ago when Turing dreamed the machine that has made it possible.

This extreme state of exception has been relaxed. But our return to what we had once known is not and will not be the same. Something profound and fundamental has settled into our perceptions and in our relationships with others, something that was already in the world that we inhabited —the one dominated by systemic processes, global supply chains, processed foods, technological prostheses, and violence of all kinds. The return to what the Mexican government described as the "new normality", defines it well. We have returned to the same thing which, at the same time, is also new. Our relationships are and will be increasingly disembodied, mediated by technological prostheses that will distance us ever more from the carnal presence of the other. This is obvious in the glare of lights, the face masks, the increasing demand for more cell phones, computers, programs, and technical accessories to mediate all kinds of relationships, whether teaching,

commercial, friendly or even amorous. "Technology – wrote Jean Robert commenting on Illich – engenders 'non-things' made of shadows of matter [and flesh] that threaten to engulf all the residues of reality in a boundless virtuality." [4]

We are witnessing the end of an era that began more than two thousand years ago with the event of the incarnation — one that we celebrate every year with the name of Christmas (Nativity) and, increasingly watered down, marks the Western calendar — and the beginning of another era. In the absence of a name because the concepts that could grasp it do not yet exist, this era may be called post-carnal. It is impossible to form an idea of it. We live in ignorance and what we have experienced under the perceptions and regulations dictated by Covid-19 are just a glimpse of its unprecedented presence. Yet, as happens when an era has not yet been born and the previous one has not completely died, the coming of the new one will be punctuated by more chaos, more fractures and violence, and as yet unknown exclusions and segregations, the temper of which can be felt in some of the dystopias that cinematography – a disembodied art – more than literature has produced in recent decades.

Ivan Illich, who summed up his thesis on evil with a phrase from Saint Jerome, *corruptio optimi quae est pessima* ("the corruption of the best is the worst"), showed that with the emergence of the Gospel a new, totally unknown type of evil also appeared. It introduced a new way of loving that is very well expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan. For the first time, the human being was able to love another beyond the restrictions imposed by belonging to a certain *ethnos*[5] which, at

4 See, "Sistemas… en la cabeza," in *La edad de los sistemas en el pensamiento del Ilich tardío,* Ítaca, México, 2022.

5 See in this regard, "*Una relectura del Evangelio*", included in *La edad*…cited above, and above all, Ivan Illich & Davida Cayley, "L'Evangile", in *La Corruption du Meilleur Engendre le Pire*", ACTES SUD, France, 2007 (*The Rivers of North of the Future, The Testament of Ivan Illich,* House of Anansi Press, Inc., Canada, 2005). The translations are

the same time, also introduced something contrary to its gratuitousness — the temptation to preserve it through its institutionalization.[6] What was experienced as a novelty in the first Christian community – my neighbor is not the one I should love, but the one I want to love, even if he is, as the parable shows, my enemy[7] – became something else when the Empire gave it imperial rank and, nascent Christendom, touched by Roman law, became a power. From that moment on, the parable which responded to the very precise question of "Who is my neighbor?", was read as the answer to another question, which though not in the parable was inferred from it; "How should I behave with my neighbor?" With this change, the neighbor ceased to be understood as an other with whom I establish a free, personal relationship that is foreign to any utilitarian criteria, and became, first, everyone who suffers and to whom we must attend; and then, everyone who must be educated in the

mine. See also, Javier Sicilia, Preface to t. II of *Obras reunidas* de Iván Illich, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 2008 and Javier Sicilia, "Memoria y el rostro", in *Conspiratio 06*, July-August, 2006.

6 Reading the incarnation of God from the parable of the Good Samaritan, it would be necessary to say with Illich and against the classical theology of the Church, that the incarnation was not something owed, something necessary, a divine plan for our salvation. On the contrary, it was, like the act of the Good Samaritan, a gesture of freedom, a free and loving act, a response, without restrictions or obligations or debts, to the call of someone in need. See *ibid*. and "*Una relectura del Evangelio*".

7 This was expressed in the fact that Christian families always had a candle stub, a little bread and a bed in case Jesus knocked on their door in the form of a stranger; a practice that is still preserved in some monasteries. It was also expressed symbolically in the first liturgies in which the mystery (*mysterium* originally meant representation) of the love brought by Christ for the benefit of all was represented. In them, recalls Ivan Illich, there were two fundamental moments that the modern liturgy of the Mass preserves only amputated of its most somatic expressions: the *conspiratio* (the greeting of peace) and the *comestio* (the Eucharistic communion). The *conspiratio* (breathe with, union of breaths), which takes its meaning from the Latin *spiritu* (spirit, whiff, breath, air), the supreme form of interiority, was a kiss on the mouth, an exchange of breaths, a sharing of vital principle, which in the Hebrew tradition is also part of the vitality of God who through his breath, his *ruaj* – a carnal act – breathes life, as when he created Adam. With that kiss on the mouth, the participants of the *agape* shared his spirit. Thus, they designated their union in the breath, in the *ruaj* of God, wherein the community took shape. It was a co-breath, a conspiracy: the creation of a common atmosphere.

faith of the Church for their own good, for their own salvation. Love thereby also lost its free and gratuitous character; it became a duty, a rule whose violation is criminalized.

This way of understanding *agape* began to corrupt the incarnation by not only institutionalizing love — subjecting it to stringent administration, but also by using power to guarantee its fulfillment, which was paid for by the community. Things that were previously inconceivable now arose in the sphere of the Greek, Roman, and even the Jewish world: houses for foreigners, widows, and orphans that morphed into hospitals, which, once the State stripped the Church of that power, became the entire network of services that we know well in the modern world. Institutions for health, for education, for transportation, for the care of the elderly, for welfare, for services of all kinds were born from the attempt to establish and extend Christian love to the whole world. These institutions have become essential to satisfy the needs that they impute to us all.

It is difficult to grasp the character of disincarnation and evil that is institutionalized care. We are so imbued with understanding love as an institutional duty and our neighbor as an abstract and impersonal reality, that nothing is more irritating and repulsive for us than knowing that there are neglected people, people who suffer and yet, are deprived of services. When the State forgets or is incapable of providing what we today call basic services – education, health, transport –to the most vulnerable, then humanitarian associations and political movements arise. These seek to compel the State to satisfy needs that are impossible to satisfy —there will never be enough education, health, transportation, communication, or commodities. They are also blind to the way that such meliorating institutions generate forms of exclusion, misery, and violence – evil – which were unknown in pre-Christian times. What was born from the gratuitousness of love became an

institutional obligation with increasingly utilitarian purposes that, while they deprive us of our autonomy, also separate us from the charity expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Cut off from the heaven that the clerical institution promised us, the service society that emerged from its bowels now promises us a heaven stripped of the weight, the density, of the flesh of our neighbor and of his call. Mediated from our birth to our death by institutions endowed with increasingly sophisticated systemic devices – ranging from obstetric care to funeral parlors and by the many thousands of networks and industrial processes that interconnect them – our flesh has been giving way to impersonal, anesthetized, assisted living. Not only, says Illich, did this institutionalization of the flesh excise the neighbor as a subject of freedom as implied in the parable of the Good Samaritan, it also created the so-called need for services and commodities that can never be enough for everyone.

To better explain this disincarnation, Illich uses the term eversion: turning something inside out, like a seamstress does with the sleeve of a dress or a glove. Throughout his work, Illich, historically explained from many angles – school, medicine, transportation, optics, somatics, the alphabet, water, gender… – the subtle processes of that eversion that no one had seen before until him and few others have yet fully understood, which only proves the seductive strength of the eversion that we inhabit.

Following his method, I want to talk about another element of this eversion that Illich outlined in *Guarding the eye in the age of show*[8] and in a letter written to his friend Hellmut Becker, then director of the Max-Planck Institute in Berlin, published as *The loss of world and flesh*. I want to focus on the eversion or corruption of the resurrected flesh that I believe I discover in the technological devices and the demonization of

8 This essay has not yet been published in Spanish.

flesh instituted by the emergence of Covid-19.

The Gospel and the idea of the incarnation brought with it not only the new idea of a love that allowed me to love in the flesh, another who does not belong to my *ethnos* but to God himself. It also brought the idea of the resurrection of the flesh: that our flesh, like that of Jesus in which God became incarnate, will rise again after death. The event, like that of the incarnation, was just as surprising and bewildering. Nothing could have predicted that the tortured and destroyed flesh that lay in the bowels of a cave could rise again. That idea was as absurd as the idea of the incarnation of God. However, it is part of the Gospel. It is the corollary of the gratuity of love. "If Christ has not risen", says Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, "our faith is vain". I say that it is the corollary of that gratuitousness because the idea of the resurrection, like that of the incarnation, is a gift as gratuitous as it is unexpected. The resurrection is the response to the call of the flesh that death interrupted and that is restored by the same love which made creation and incarnation possible. Before the Gospel was read from a utilitarian perspective and the resurrection was thought necessary and planned from the beginning of time, it was a gift of the flesh, mine and that of the other, of Jesus and our neighbor, as the privileged place of love, of encounter, and of celebration of the encounter.

The very ambiguity of Jesus' risen flesh, half himself, half other,[9] emphasizes this. It is, at the same time, his own and that of our neighbor who, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, challenges us beyond any obligation, any norm in-

9 Mary Magdalene, who mistakes him for the gardener in the tomb garden, recognizes him by the way he says his name; the pilgrims from Emmaus, who have walked with him there, because of the way he breaks the bread; the disciple when he shows his wounds, and John, on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, by an interior revelation – "It is the Lord!" – which he communicates to Peter and the disciples who fish together and do not recognize him in the man who asks them to cast the nets to the right side of the boat.

cluding death itself. It is the act that seals the Gospel: where two or three are gathered in his name (Mt. 18: 20); everyone who loves his neighbor loves him in his flesh (Mt. 10: 40-42; 18: 5 and 25: 35-45; Jn. 15:13) or, to return to the dialogue with the Levite who initiated the parable — if we really love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves, we will have eternal life. Not life in the abstract, but in the flesh, which is the only way the human being and all living things live and experience their relationship with themselves, with others, and with the world they inhabit.

The original community seems to have understood the resurrection that way. Despite the strangeness of the flesh of the risen Jesus, it did not question its reality. Despite the imprecision of his features, what mattered was that his resurrected flesh was flesh again: he felt as when he was alive, he ate, he spoke, showed his wounds. Instead of racking their brains seeking to understand the type of flesh it was, the community celebrated the carnal presence of the resurrection in the love brought about by the incarnation, that is, in the flesh of their neighbor. The early liturgies, which I describe in note 6, show this. This is also shown by the way of life described in the *Acts of the Apostles* (4: 32-36) and the exhortation that Paul makes to the Colossians. In his letter, he calls them to live Christ in the flesh of their neighbor in which, due to this new love brought by the Gospel, "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."

For witnesses of the resurrection who were recently created in the love of Christ and were awaiting his imminent return that would establish in the world what they already lived under that new love, the resurrection was at the very center of their carnal experience. It was a longing that still awaited its fullness in the resurrection of what was already living in the community, not in a transformation of the flesh,

but in a new experience of living it in accord with the depth of the revealed event: the participation in the being of Jesus that makes them, like him, beings for others.

However, once this horizon was revealed, the temptation arose to know the kind of flesh that was the risen body of Jesus, and for the same reason, the kind of flesh that awaited us in the resurrection, what we had to do to acquire it, to be deserving of it, and how to escape from the corruptibility of the flesh. It seems to me, the one who introduced this problem is Paul himself.

In the best tradition of primitive Christianity, Paul saw the obstacle to clothe himself with the love brought by the Gospel, that is, to become like Christ, in the desires of the ego. Nevertheless, it was also Paul who introduced, on the one hand, in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans, the idea of the flesh as a reality opposed to the spirit – "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other." On the other hand, – in the first letter to the Corinthians – he also introduced the idea that in the resurrection, the flesh ceases to be flesh, to become a glorious body, incorruptible, and immortal unlike the flesh – "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption."

In Paul, the flesh is not properly the origin of evil, but like the good, its receptacle. His point of reference is the emptying of himself to become like Christ and to go out to meet his neighbor: "I no longer live – he says in the letter to the Galatians – but Christ lives in me". Few, have left more fascinating pages on *kenosis* (the emptying of God as power, as well as of the I, which is the form of power in the human being) and *agape* (love expressed in the Gospel) than has Paul. However, by contrasting the flesh with the spirit and referring to the flesh of the resurrection as a body, he introduced an ambiguity that, in time, made the flesh the cause of evil. Vague in

Paul and satanized over time, it was no longer the flesh but the spirit that became the object of the resurrection. The spirit is later associated with the soul understood as "the breath of life" (subsequently related to the intellect: the ability to do good), as an immaterial principle that animates life and is related to the *ruaj* (breath) of God, which in *Genesis* fluttered over the abyss before being articulated in words and gave life to the muddy body of Adam. That immaterial principle became the guide to our actions and, by subduing the flesh, allows us to resurrect in an unpolluted body not tied to the desires of the flesh and its corruptibility. This is a glorious body, says Paul, which means one that possesses greatness, splendor, and happiness. Morality thereby gradually replaced the unpredictable and gratuitous freedom of *agape*, to become the foundation of love.

Four centuries later, when the early Church became part of the empire with the Edict of Milan causing the corruption of the Gospel to which Illich refers, and the *parousia* – the return of Jesus — which primitive Christianity believed to be imminent was deferred in time, Augustine deepened the ambiguity introduced by Paul. According to him, the fall of Adam and Eve in paradise was a metaphysical and ontological cataclysm that made the incarnation necessary. (Augustine had already corroborated the idea of the incarnation as necessary, predetermined, and inevitable rather than as an unexpected and gratuitous act). By eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve broke the bond of love with God. Since then, the human soul (Augustine already uses this Greek category in an absolute way to refer to the immortal part of being) has been chained to the desires of the flesh for things and, consequently, to its corruptibility and death. Augustine defines the disobedience of Adam and Eve as *concupiscenctia carnis* ("lust of the flesh"). Its clearest expression for him is in

sexuality and eros – the sublimation of sex by the powers of the imagination – Augustine's quintessential example of the fallen soul's desire for things. Removed from its Augustinian context, this idea led the Church to condemn and criminalize sexuality and popular religiosity to confuse the complex metaphor of the Fall in *Genesis* with it. Thus, sexuality and eros became the fundamental sins of the flesh, along with greed, envy, laziness, gluttony, anger, and pride. In his *Life of Saint Anthony*, Athanasius of Alexandria emphasized eros among the temptations of the Desert Father – a theme that, starting with Bosch, painters would revel in – and speaks of the fall from *agape* towards sexuality as a metaphor for the corruption of the flesh.

To aspire to the resurrection and to avoid the eternal damnation of hell, the human soul was obliged to purify itself of the appetites of the flesh. According to the Platonic categories with which Augustine interprets the Gospel, the soul would not animate this flesh, but a different body from the one we had here; a spiritualized body, free from the constrictions of the flesh and its appetites, inhabited by a peace and happiness that are beyond all comprehension. With diverse, subtle, and complex distinctions that inhabit the intricate building that are theology and philosophy which have shaped the West, the flesh – with its finiteness, its joys, its sufferings, its corruptibility, and death – was criminalized to become the source of evil that had to be denied through the moral and institutional care of the Church in favor of a body defined with the abstract and immaterial categories of the soul.[10] In this way, the flesh not only acquired, together with the devil and the world, the status of enemy of the soul, but the Church itself evicted the flesh from the resurrection, changing the for-

10 Thomas Aquinas – who, unlike Augustine thought Aristotle from the standpoint of the Gospel – believed in the unity of body and soul, and in the resurrection of a body identical to the one we have here but, similar to that of Paul and Augustine, transfigured and free from the appetites of and ties to the flesh.

mula of the Apostles' *Creed* – "I believe in the resurrection of the flesh" –, for an ambiguous, but less problematic –"I believe in the resurrection of the dead".

This subtle and almost invisible eversion of the flesh of the resurrection can be best seen in pictorial art. Long before painting acquired a certificate of naturalization in the Church, the incarnation, which was born within Judaism (it would have been inconceivable to think of it without YHWH's own carnality, a God who feels, gets angry, suffers, loves and speaks, always speaks), was also imbued with the prohibition of the second commandment to make images, expressed in the book of *Exodus*: "You shall not make to you any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them […]". This prohibition is at the heart of Augustine's theory of *conscupiscensia carnis*, whereby Adam and Eve, by breaking with God's will in paradise, fractured not only his image and likeness in them, but in all of creation.

It seems that the first disciples and the primitive community complied with the prohibition against images. Apart from a supposed portrait of Mary which, according to tradition, was painted by Lucas and has never actually been found, the only image that is recorded and preserved in the Palatine Antiquarian Museum in Rome, has the character of mocking Faith. It is, Illich tells us, a drawing on plaster, dated between the 1st and 2nd centuries during the reign of Emperor Domitian, known as "Alexamenos graffito". Made with coarse and childish lines, it represents Jesus crucified with the head of a donkey. To his left is a man with his hand raised and a legend written in Greek*: Alexámenos cébetai theón* ("Alexamenos worships [his] God"). There are a handful of images dating to the 3rd century, depicting the Annunciation, the Good Shepherd, and the Adoration of the Magi, and many more found

in the catacombs. Despite the ban on images, the Christian community was not scandalized by the creation of this type of image. Even if they did not fully accept them, they did not forbid them either.

I will not detail the history of the iconoclastic controversy, which also informs Illich's understanding of the icon and the gaze. It is sufficient for my purposes here to note that from the end of that dispute brought about by the "iconoclastic reform" until the schism of East and West in the 11th century, pantocrators, Christ teachers, trinities, crowned virgins, and, to a lesser degree, annunciations, births, or evangelical passages of the miracles of Jesus will accompany the pictorial pedagogy of the Church. In them, the exaltation of the glorious body is represented by the trappings of power transformed into an extramundane and extra carnal domain: thrones from where a haloed Christ, with the Gospel in his left hand and the gesture of blessing in his right, dominates the world above the crosier and sword of the emperor; Mary, enthroned in heaven carrying the baby Jesus, haloed, like her, on her lap. These are bodies clothed in the power of glory that symbolize the immortal body devoid of the miseries of the flesh. This exaltation of an immortal body will become more this-worldly in their depictions of power and its pageantry.

The Eastern Church preserves and cultivates these images from which smallness, suffering, death, and the putrefaction of the flesh have been erased. Nourished on such images, it can be understood why a deeply spiritual man like Dostoevsky when confronted by the pale, greenish, bloodless flesh of Holbein's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the tomb* would cry out, "this painting can make you lose faith". Accustomed to Byzantine iconography, the orthodox Dostoevsky could not bear the horror of flesh condemned and not transformed into the glorious body of the resurrection. The impact that Holbein's image had on him was witnessed by his wife

Anna Gregorievna and remains one of the most lucid and vivid passages in *The Idiot*. On returning from the visit to the Museum of Fine Arts in Basel where the painting is located, Dostoevsky was very disturbed and cried out in Anna's presence the very phrase that he later puts into Mishkin's mouth, and suffered, like him, the severest of his epileptic attacks. It was as if his flesh, carrying the guilt of desiring the death of his father and the Tsar – vicarious symbols of God in Christ – was ashamed of itself and was punishing itself for having desired those deaths, also separated from the resurrection.

However, Dostoevsky's carnal reaction to Holbein's image of Christ barred from the resurrection was in keeping with the intent of the painting. It is the time when the Western Church, particularly in Spain, begins to accent spiritual reflection neither on the incarnation of the nativity nor on the resurrection of the Church already robed by the empire, but on the passion and death of Jesus. Although in Holbein – particularly in his sculptures in which Christs and virgins are taken to their crudest and most painful realism – the suffering and death of Christ are decontextualized from the resurrection, just as in Spanish religious art, the intention is to make the faithful feel responsible for causing the suffering of Christ by their carnal desires. This is a subject that will become deeper and terribly painful after the French revolution, not in painting, but in handbooks of spirituality.[11]

In these, the suffering of Christ is the reminder of our inability to deny ourselves in our flesh for him and thereby prevent him from resurrecting in the body of the Church, which is made of us, human beings. For that to become possible, it is necessary for us to deny ourselves in our flesh, to mor-

11 There is, on the other hand, in the *Trinity* of Masaccio a tomb similar to that of Holbein, in which a startling skeleton, representing not Christ, but Adam, lies under the cross that is raised and is received, in the suspended body of Christ, by the Father and the Holy Spirit – an exquisite line that simulates the neck of his clothing.

tify it until it is separated from the soul, to suffer like Christ and therefore be worthy of the resurrection. The wounds on the body of Christ which, until the 17th century could be seen as a refuge from our own sufferings, gradually acquired this face of shame. The carnality of the world that had led God to become incarnated and to suffer had to be erased from ours.

Ascesis[12] (the athlete's exercise, the work on gross matter, spiritual discipline) has been practiced by mystics, and the monastic tradition since the Desert Fathers tried to empty themselves and recover the *agape* brought by the incarnation. Fasting, silence, prayer, austerity, fraternity, and forgiveness no less than flagellation, hairshirts, hot irons, and, epilepsy in Dostoevsky, were forms of penance directed against the flesh; symbolic expression of the denial of the flesh in favor of a body that strains for resurrection.

Whoever seeks Christ must seek the perfect body, seek the immaculate image of the body that one will have in the resurrection through the mortification of the flesh. This was also the time when, according to the institutionalization of the Church, the priest became the vicarious presence of Christ. Whoever aspired to the priesthood had to be an image of the corporeal perfection of the risen man. Contrary to what may be thought in modern secularism, this idea was not intended to harm anyone but instead to help human beings escape the misery of their flesh, to subject the flesh to intense attention to preserve the soul from its corruptibility and to lead it to animate an immortal body.

This idea is close to how Christianity understood the incarnation. For the most pious believers, the Church added this idea to the set of institutional practices that, from its first charitable foundations, had in its discipline and administra-

12 Tomás Calvillo and I dedicated an essay to this point titled "Ascesis or the oasis of the body," original in Spanish: La ascesis o el oasis del cuerpo. in *La revelación y los* días, Cuadernos de la Orquesta, SEP, 1987.

tion, the same function of subduing the flesh to save it from its corruptibility. Just as the purpose of penance and the sacraments is to save the soul from the flesh and its desires, so the school, the orphanage, and the hospital still have the function of saving the soul from ignorance, defenselessness, and suffering the finiteness of the flesh, all in the name of a healthy body and soul. In these institutions, which the modern state born of Enlightenment ideas and of the French Revolution will later administer and multiply alongside the Church, penance becomes discipline and therapy. For those who did not want to accept this idea – heretics, apostates, witches... – there were other disciplinary institutions, including the stake, where the flesh could be purified to save the soul from its possible eternal damnation. Since the Church institutionalized *agape* and viewed the flesh as evil, the human being has become a fallen being who, confined to the limits of his flesh, is in need of salvation. As in the Church's reading of the parable of the Samaritan and of the incarnation, saving the human being means being obliged to heal the wounded flesh of a neighbor who has acquired the abstract status of anybody.

The secular State appropriated this vocation of the Church and evicted it from its theological home by accusing the Church of being against freedom while, in reality, the State continued the task of building an immortal body — one destined not for heaven but on earth itself. While the disciplines and therapies of modern institutions appear bloodless and organized to promote freedom, they are, in reality, just as bloody as the penitential disciplining of sinful flesh and just as hopeful in building an immortal body as was the dream of the Church. We relentlessly fight and even shed blood, to institute schools, hospitals, transportation and communication systems, products and services of all kinds to make bodies full of greatness, strength, and happiness just like the glorious body of theology. We submit to weird sufferings that sever us

from the flesh in the name of a body free of suffering. All the technological developments which the Covid-19 emergency amplified is condensed, like a metaphor, on the screens. There, we appear devoid of our flesh, as a radiant body. Just as the iron, the scourge, and the thumbscrew once did for the quasi-celestial body, this subjugation of the flesh distances it from the contamination implied by the presence of the world and the flesh of others.

What else does suffering the counterproductivities of medical therapies, of schoolwork, and of transportation speak of? What else do the painful penances of the medical beauty industry, that modern *farmakon* of eternal youth, speak of? What else does the sting of permanently unsatisfied desires to acquire this or that thing or service speak of? What do automation and robotics intend to replace the flesh, or the indelible tattoos and intradermal implants that regulate body temperature in any type of climate, say about the flesh? What does the diffusion and expansive use of increasingly sophisticated media say? Do not all of these promise to produce that radiant body which the Church no longer offers? Are not both state-sponsored social services and profiles on the screen its clearest metaphors? Do they not all speak of bodies devoid of flesh, radiant images unstained by any possibility of contagion, glorious in their haloed presence; no longer doorways but barred doors, simulating a resurrection as luminous as the light on the screen where our corporeality now appears?

In this world, in which not everyone can fit – Illich showed its exclusionary character, its impossibility of satisfying everyone – there are, however, certain types of flesh that can neither be saved nor ever acquire the glorious and anesthetized body that technology in its many guises promise. This flesh is what Giorgio Agamben has defined as "naked life", unprotected life, the life that is marginalized by power, and that has its place, like other apostates of the Church, on

the margins, among the detritus who painfully will never be able to enjoy a body without flesh. The only thing they can aspire to, if they have not died, if they have not been murdered or disappeared, if they have not already been erased in their flesh from their passage through the world, is the gift of those so-called human rights institutions, whose origins lie in the *xenodochia* (houses for foreigners) of Christianity assumed by imperial Rome. Even though the Church wants to see the consequences of carnality in what remains in a world inhabited by the desires of the flesh, in reality, this world is the result of that eversion the Church itself caused by criminalizing the flesh, evicting it from the glorious body and then, institutionalizing *agape* in order to heal the rift.

Denis de Rougemont demonstrated in *Love in the Western World* that adultery in the Western novel is what remains when the West stripped the novel of its Cathar theological origin. So also, what remains of the glorious body once expelled from its theological basis is the body of the modern world which does not want to die. In submitting itself to every kind of institutional therapy, oblivious to the world and to the alienations of the flesh, this body opens in a paradoxically painful way – a category of the flesh – to a post-carnal era; a body whose suffering lies in the very intention to amputate it from its flesh. What Michel Foucault called biopower, a disciplining of the body for social control is, in reality, a disciplining of the flesh whose purpose is to build amortal bodies free of suffering, a body accustomed to increasingly sophisticated post-carnal technological prostheses which redeem it of the wonderful and unbearable weight of the flesh and the world.

From a spiritual perspective, this is what we call evil. Evil is not carnality or the absence of good but, as Illich saw, the deep and brutal eversion of the best thing that came into the world — *agape*; an eversion in the most proper and intimate part of the human being — in his flesh, that is, in disin-

carnation. It is also what in the eschatological tradition (the time of the last things) is called "the end of time", a drama that – according to a penetrating tradition that comes from Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians (2:1-11), the *misterium iniquitatis* – comes from the Church itself. This is what I have tried to say in this approach to the flesh, in "the time of the end and of the *katekhon* (the one who holds back)", following Illich and Agamben.

I do not know if this is the meaning that the word *Apocalypse* – the book with which the Christian Bible ends. The revelation, the definitive arrival of the kingdom in the midst of a terrible conflagration, where what we had known will be devastated or, better, the recognition, in the midst of the darkest of nights, of the light of the *agape* that we betray. It is a matter concerning faith about which not even faith knows anything. The terrible, dazzling, and cryptic images of the *Apocalypse*, as well as the suggestive and no less terrifying speech of Jesus, known as "Great Tribulation" (Mt. 24), lack a date and a time. It is, however, in the time of the end. The world that ends is the world that came with the incarnation, the world of the flesh and *agape*, a world that, in its long eversion, lasted more than two thousand years. The absence of public worship during the months of the pandemic and its increasingly widespread transmission through electronic screens is the ominous sign of disincarnation within the Church itself. The world that is announced and seems irreversible is its confirmation: it is a post-carnal world, whose consequences are unimaginable; an abyss of the same depth but contrary to the height of the incarnation, one whose unfathomable horror made Illich exclaim in bitter bewilderment that he felt the "temptation of cursing God's Incarnation".

We must live this condition without illusions. Just as great losses are experienced, just as Illich did towards

the end of his life, just as I have lived with the murder of my son Juan Francisco at a time when so many crimes continue to happen in my country. We must allow all the weight of its irremediable loss and its immense pain to enter, while we still preserve and celebrate what we can still preserve and celebrate of the *agape* that one day came into the world through the flesh.

The Technique that Produced the First Female Fetus*

by Barbara Duden

In rummaging through old atlases in search of how anatomists once viewed the unborn child, I ran into a surprisingly empty space. What is naturally "seen" today as an embryonic form and as the first stage of "the human being" lay in a blind spot for centuries: a being devoid of any human proportion — fat-headed, stumps for arms, bow-legged — was not recognized as a child in the making. The child-to-be was shown in many ways in anatomical treatises and atlases, but the pregnant woman's body was never the field/canvas/context for human developmental stages. Then, a Frankfurt anatomist, Samuel Thomas Soemmerring, brought the unrelated, motherless fetus into a new space of a-perspectival objectivity, using a new drawing technique that has no standpoint (*Standpunklosen*).

Two series of lectures in 1992, one at the University of Göttingen, the other at the Freie Universität Berlin on "Women's and Gender History" gave me the occasion to point out the radical change in the history of women and pregnant women that was effected by the technical production of the "fetus." The woman's coming child, a matter of her hearts' desire, appears here in the perceptually estranged because constructed space of a-perspective objectivity.

* This article is a section of the chapter entitled "Schwangerschaft: die Gute Hoffnung und die Diagnose" from Barbara Duden Die Gene im Kopf – der Fotus im Bauch: Historisches zum Frauenkorper, Hannover, Offizin-Verl., 2002, pp.69-83. Jutta Mason was kind enough to translate it.

Barbara Duden, b.duden@ish.uni-hannover.de
Duden, B. The Technique that Produced
the First Female Fetus. Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 80 - 97

It is probably ten years ago that I began to immerse myself ever more deeply into the history of the body in modern times. By then, women historians whom I admire had already declared this topic in women's history to be closed. "Do we really have to unpack the history of women through their bodies?" asked Arlette Farge in 1984. It was a rhetorical question for her, just before shelving the issue. Yet the historicity of the body experience captivated me, because for me it became the key to the gender relations that are typically reflected today in the conflict over abortion, in the discussion about reproductive medicine, or in the so-called "Erlanger baby" (when a pregnant mother is brain-dead but kept alive to bring the baby to term). As baby, the new being is a matter of the heart in relation to a woman, whereas the Fetus creates its niche as a problem of hormonal regulation.

I want to interpret the first depiction of a woman's "fetus". The figure comes from a work by Samuel Thomas Soemmerring.[1] As far as I can see in the history of the unborn, it is the first such depiction of a female fetus. As you know, Eve went through no fetal stage, for she was made during sleep as – I quote from the medieval sources – *collateralis et aequalis* of man's flesh, and not of dust like man. According to the current state of historical research, the daughters of Eve, as we were called, went through no fetal stage up to 1799. I'm speaking *ab mundo condito*, since the creation of the world. Eve, according to the Jewish calendar, was created about 6000 BC., and over the generations from Sarah, to Anna, to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and for another 1799 years – a nearly eight-thousand-year history – there was no fetus. Of course, before Soemmerring, there were other depictions of women in utero: I am thinking of the little girl in a five-picture series from the 12th century, demonstrating "childhood" in an up-

1 Samuel Thomas Soemmerring, *Icones Embryonum Humanorum,* Frankfurt/M. 1799.

side-down cupping glass;[2] I am thinking of a baroque panel on which an Unborn baby with a slit belly proudly points her index finger at her hymen and other female innards. But neither the demure spinster in the miniature nor the little exhibitionist from Adrian Spieghel's 1626 treatise on the formed fetus do I call "fetuses". And, of course, the kicking putto from a 1604 Paduan print isn't a fetus either; "c" shows the sweat in which it swims (*sudor cui innatat fetus*) and "b" what was then called the "belly root" in anatomical German, i.e., the umbilical cord.[3] I classify all of these figures as symbolic representations of unborn children. I contrast them with the depiction of the pre-child, i.e., the fetal, the embryonic form, as it was first depicted by Soemmerring.

What I want to offer for discussion has two sides. First, the fascination of a German scholar in 1799 with sex determination *ab ovo*; second, the break in the history of gender relations, which becomes visible in the appearance of the fetal figure. This engraving of a female fetus is not only a new appearance as a fetus and as a prenatal woman, but also as a diagram. What is represented is not what the anatomist saw, but as I will show, what he measured. Based on this figure/image, I want to discuss the emergence of a singular paradox around 1800: technogenesis, the technologically determined emergence of the simulacrum of gender neutrality in intimate connection with the emphasis on gender difference.

To sketch out this novel construction of a new gender relationship, I want to proceed in three steps: I want first to present my source; secondly, I want to talk about the contrast between icons and constructs of the unborn in the history of anatomical graphics; thirdly, I want to say something about

2 For these illustrations in anatomical manuscripts and prints, see Barbara Duden, *Anatomie der Guten Hoffnung: Studien zur graphsichen Darstellung des Ungeboren*, Stuttgart 1999.

3 "b" and "c" refer to panels of the Paduan print discussed (Ed.).

the method of image interpretation. I want to show that I can only get at this picture if I distinguish between an iconographic and an iconological analysis of anatomical graphics. Only then can I interpret the two panels by Samuel Thomas Soemmerring from which the figure of the little fetus comes.

The Sources: Soemmerring's List

In 1799 Soemmerring published the *Icones Embryonum Humanorum* in the Elephantenfolio. At the age of 44, he was the leading anatomist in Germany, with whom Goethe had been in correspondence about the premaxillary bone since his visit in 1783. Soemmerring's theses involved important contemporaries in controversies: about the degeneration in the physique of a Moor living in Kassel Wilhelmshöhe, which Soemmering thought was the result of climate[4]; about the cultural deformation of ribs, waist and hips produced by cinching the waist; about the organ of the soul in the body; about eye and ear; about the possibility of electric telegraphy.

The *Prefatio* to the *Icones*, the foreword to the foundational work of the "Illustrations of Human Embryos" begins with a listing of its predecessors/antecedents. Soemmerring names 37 anatomical treatises in which human embryos or women's eggs were not only described, but also presented graphically. The list begins with Hieronymus Fabricius ab Aquapendente, a successor of Vesal on the chair of anatomy in Padua at the beginning of the 17th century, from whose *De Formato Foetu* comes the putto, which I will later use as a contrast to Soemmerring. Soemmerring also notes that he had seen the copies engraved in copper by Jan Wandelaar in 1738.

Soemmerring's chronological list of illustrations of eggs and embryos is still unsurpassed today. I have supple-

4 Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, Boston 1993, p.115ff.

mented Soemmerring's list with further illustrations from the 15th to 17th centuries and created a complete corpus of graphic representations of the unborn in prints since 1492. During this investigation, I have come to the conclusion that Soemmerring is correct in claiming that he was the first to produce a series of figures showing the "human body from the third week to ... the sixth month."[5]

Astigmatism, or the contrast between child and fetus

This claim to be the first, on the part of the professor, who was already well established through marriage in Frankfurt, is even more surprising because gynecological illustrations had long been in circulation in scholarly treatises and popular broadsheets. Beyond that, cheap and illustrated midwifery handbooks had also been available since the 17th century. These showed not only the "birth organs of every woman (illustrated), how such are internally formed and situated", but also "how the child fits and rests in the womb."[6] And yet Soemmerring is right: *nascituri,* children getting ready to be born, were to be seen, but what was never seen was what he himself wanted to show, the embryo. The contents of the pregnant mother remained an emblem.

Thanks to the art of dissection and preparation, thanks to the rules of perspective and cross-hatching, thanks to the increase in plasticity and tactile quality in the transition from woodcut to copperplate engraving, it was precisely during this period that ever more realistic depictions of entrails and

5 Soemmerring, *Icones*, Foreword, in Karen Newman, *Fetal Positions: Individualism, Science, Visuality*, Stanford 1996. The author collected images of the unborn in the same period, interpreting them, however, with a belief in modernity, as "fetal" figures that have always been the same.

6 Jacob Rueff, *Hebammenbuch, Daraus man alle heimlichkeit des weiblichen Geschlechts erlernen*, Frankfurt/M. 1580, p.28.

the most delicate tissues emerged. The vesicles on the surface of epithelia and the capillaries in the transparent membrane of the uterus had been pricked out with astonishing fidelity since the end of the 17th century - mostly based on dissection. And yet, over a period of 300 years, despite the availability of these graphic means, the figure that has settled as a fact in the minds of pregnant women in 19th-century textbooks and is today mediated onscreen, remained unseeable.

Up until Soemmerring, the graphics showed the child to come. The child was not depicted but appeared symbolically, emblematically, fantastically, and occasionally, in a macabre way. In the case of the Dane Kaspar Bartholin (1675??), triplets with the facial expressions and demeanor of civil servants dance attached to their umbilical cords around a placenta that has been removed from the body. Dutch taxidermist Frederik Ruysch obsessively collected women's miscarriages, sealed them in jars, and stuffed his Amsterdam home with them in the 1770s. He built tableaux for this museum, placing the fetal skeleton on a mound of gallstones and having it point a finger at a memento mori of mummified body parts. His small skeletons serve as symbols, but they do not refer to fetal development.

The unborn child was delineated as a little boy, as a little bundle unwound from its covering, as a small-boned man. But then, when something is described in the text that strikes us as somewhat "fetal," it is interpreted as a big-headed loach, a mole, a mooncalf, or an outgrowth. Miscarriages, which today are seen as "premature births", were then still "moon calves" and "false fruits", i.e., shapeless deformities.[7]

In his anatomical studies around 1505, Leonardo da Vinci places a cowering infant back in the womb, making him

7 Also, Barbara Duden, 'Ein falsch Gewächs, ein unzeitig Wesen, gestocktes Blut.' Zur Geschichte der Wahrnehmung und Sichtweise der Leibesfruchtn in *unter anderen Umständen. Zur Geschichte der Abtreibung,* ed. Gisela Staupe und Lisa Vieth. Berlin 1993, pp. 27-35.

an icon of the microcosm and placing him in the center of the spherical shells of the *matrix*. In Fabrizius ab Aquapendente, the visual prejudice in favor of the child is even more revealing. His *De formato foetu* (Venice 1604) contains a number of engravings on which the fetuses of mice, dogs, sheep, and horses, often nestled in the *matrix*, are depicted so convincingly that they still captivate every zoologist today. Not only are they beautiful, but they are also accurate images, says Joseph Needham, the embryologist. But when the same Fabrizius on plate III has progressed to the child in the *matrix* panel, he shows a kicking, baroque child in its lotus-like calyx, which we learn is "a foetus, two months after conception." Even William Hunter, the obstetrician at the English court and author of the uniquely magnificent atlas on *The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus*, London 1774, on the last panel of which worms can be seen in skin sacs, only represents the fetus insofar as it is an object that has the form of the uterus in successive stages. Until the late 18th century, anatomists never allowed the unborn child to be depicted as a fetal form.

This long-term absence of the pre-infantile figure in increasingly realistically illustrated panels *de utero gravido* compelled me to seek the cause of this squint. What is striking here is that traditional symbolizations of the unborn appear side-by side, and in stark contrast with research-based gynecological depictions, sometimes on the same page. The unborn continued to be denoted by an iconogram, a symbol, while the former iconogram for the *matrix*, the "mother" gradually disappeared in the 17th century through the depiction of the uterus. Up to that point, the anatomical graphics of both the *matrix* and the child were determined by the eye-shaping power of pictorial metaphors from antiquity. Since Soranus, the Roman physician, the mother was a "pot", a "barrel", and her ligaments were conceived as "horns." This image which was part of everyday talk, continued through the sixteenth

and early seventeenth centuries. The uterus, as cut and drawn by the anatomist, took the form of the inverted, two-handled vessel sitting on two horns. This is no longer the case with Regnier de Graaf in 1672[8]. On Plate XXII of his treatise on the generative organs of women he shows an *abortus trium mensium*. There one sees on the left, the three-month-old "abortus", still attached to the umbilical cord, standing upright with his left leg slightly raised, his arm bent and the sad look of a scolded servant (as no one could imagine it today). On the right of the picture lies the placenta, as you can still recognize it today. The unborn child continues to be placed as an emblem in the increasingly 'realistic' depiction of the mother's bowels. Up until Soemmerring's lifetime, the anatomist depicting women was almost exclusively concerned with the *matrix*.

Iconography and Iconology: two approaches

Since 1976,[9] historical women's studies have examined -- often with amusement -- the anatomists' view of the opposite sex. During the Enlightenment, a female skeleton was constructed for the first time and compared with the male. In every detail of the peculiarly feminine morphology and physiology, researchers perceived an argument for women's place in nature, in the economy, and in institutions: from the way the pelvis was adapted for marriage and childbearing to the way the knees fitted the sewing machine. In many areas of 19th-century women's history, the iconogra-

8 Regnier de Graaf, *De mulierum organis generationi inservientibus*. Leiden 1672, plate XXII. De Graaf makes one think of the "egg" because at a time when both preformists and epigeneticists were convinced of the existence of the woman's egg, he drew the follicles of the ovary and became famous for these misunderstood "eggs". See Jacques Roger, *Les sciences de la vie la pensée Française du XVIII siècle*. Paris, Armond Colin, 1963.

9 I refer to the then groundbreaking essay by Yvonne Kniebiehler, "Les médecins et la 'nature féminine' au temps du Code Civil." *Annals E.S.C.* 31, no. 4 (1976): 424-445.

phy of medical tracts became a key to understanding how 'biology', as a 19th-century form of social thought, became sociologically powerful.[10]

I am trying to complement this gender-historical iconography with an iconology of anatomical graphics.[11] The two – *-graphy* and *-logy* – can best be distinguished when one thinks of geography and geology. Geography records the facts, clarifies the details, sees what there is to see. Geology studies structure, internal formation, origin, consistency. Iconology is the study of images as a symptom of a cultural situation. Accordingly, I am not concerned with the individual features of the new image of women — the differing proportions of torso and head, the female skull, the hip bones, with which scholars from Albinus to Kant, Schiller, and Humboldt, to the head measurers and brain weighers of the 19th century were preoccupied — but with a new way of looking at things. Iconography decodes the factual and stylistic prejudices, i.e., the ideology that has become visible in the eye of the anatomist. The figurative elements of the unborn child described in the legend underpin the discourse on "woman's natural destiny for motherhood".[12]

In sharp contrast to this, an iconological analysis of the *Icones Embryonum* shows that here for the first time, the genesis of the human/man is presented without any reference to a

10 Claudia Honegger, *Die Ordnung der Geschlechter. Die Wissenschaften vom Menschen und das Weib*, Frankfurt/M, 1991, worked up the tortuous paths of this "special anthropology" of women in medical discourse; see also Ute Frevert, *'Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann' : Geschlechterdifferenzen in der Moderne*, Munich 1995.

11 Jan Bialostocki. "Iconography and Iconology" *Encyclopedia of World Art*. vol ?? col 769-785.

12 For example, the anatomist Ackermann 1787: "In this way, the woman is mainly set up to fulfill the great intention that nature has only intended for this sex, namely, to carry the child in the womb until it is mature … and to give birth." Quoted from Claudia Honegger, *Die Ordnung der Geschlechter*, p.176.

mother.[13] The Soemmerring embryos are rid of every remnant of the fetal membrane from the seventh week. From the fourth to the eighth month, they are shown without the umbilical cord. The replacement of the expected child by a navel-less fetus, which in contrast to the "unborn child" has been removed from any relation to the woman, transforms the mother and with it the very idea of gender. The appearance of the fetus around 1799 gives rise to a new kind of woman and with it, by logical necessity, of a new relationship between the sexes.

With the visualization of the pre-infantile human, the sexual being *ab ovo*, something like the nova seen by the astrologer Tycho Brahe in 1572 in the constellation of Cassiopeia comes into being. After Tycho had spotted a never-before-seen star on the way home, he first called his housemates and then farmers from the market and asked them to look and see if he had not been deceived. For, if a completely new star was to shine on God's counted/numbered heavens, then it was not just a new constellation, but a new cosmos that had to be thought up.

The fetus is like a nova in that sense: not in the sky, but in the womb. Maternity, pregnancy and childbirth no longer refer to the hoped-for child but to the developing human being. I understand the *Icones embryonum humanorum* as *Icones embryonis nostri temporis*: harbingers of the inhabitants of a mother that we take for granted today. The redefinition begins here. The mother, formerly a vessel or a ploughed field, gradually becomes the environment, or even the niche, for a new immune system. Pregnancy is transformed from a haptic and kinesthetic experience, which can only be experienced by the woman, into a fact established by optical imputation. Birth changes from the epiphany of the child to a point in a process.

13 To me, this fetus is the Archimedean point for turning to a new gender relationship: profoundly contradictory, for the woman is mother and yet the fetus is a self; inaccessible to direct view, because it arises in the architectural elevation from an infinite distance, and it is abstract.

As Soemmerring put it, the unborn becomes a *stadium incrementi et metamorphosis corporis humani*, a stage of growth and transformation of a *human* body: (1) the starting point of the individual biography is advanced by 9 months; (2) the prenatal human restyles the interior of women into a theater set/scene of the early stages of life; (3) pregnancy changes from a status accorded to the woman when she bears witness to the haptic experience of childbearing, to a medical fact whose operational verification is undertaken in the birthing centers of that time. In Göttingen, Johann Georg Roederer (1759) measured and classified thirty-five wombs according to width, length, depth and height. He attempted to relate the usual date of first fetal movement in one hundred and thirty-five women to fetal growth.[14]

These shifts in perception can be examined in the two panels of the *Icones.* Plate I shows 17 figures in four rows.[15] I have enlarged Figure XII. I shall first, briefly and conventionally, make an iconographic and then an iconological observation of the page from which it comes.[16]

Iconographic interpretation

Recent historical research has mostly dealt with the motives of scholars in the anatomical comparison of man and woman around 1800, especially in Soemmerring's *Tabula sceleti feminini* (1797).[17] It has been overlooked that in his *Icones*, Soemmerring meticulously dealt with the fetal sexual characteristics.

14 Esther Fischer-Homberger, *Medizin vor Gericht*, Huber, Bern 1983.

15 Only under the first two figures is there a schematic sketch of the "crooked little worm".

16 We cannot reprint the enlarged image of Figure XII because we cannot afford the copyright cost (Ed).

17 See also Gunter Mann. "'Die Schöne Mainzerin' Samuel Thomas Soemmerrings. Medizinhistorisches" Journal 12 (1977):172-173; Londa Schiebinger, "'Skeletons in the closet': the first illustrations of the female skeleton in eighteenth-century anatomy," *Representations* 14 (1986): 42-82.

Samuel Thomas Soemmerrings. Icones Embryonum Humanorum.

From his collection, Soemmerring chose those fetuses which recommended themselves to him as types due to their "beauty," corresponding with their age. Already in the third week, he "sees" in the egg, which he has placed in di-

luted wine, a three-week-old body with bulbous extensions, hardly longer than a "Parisian line." The genitals sprout, (*efflorescunt*) early in the second month. The penis is all the more prominent the younger the embryo is, and resembles a peeled glans. The *virginalis* (maiden part) can occasionally be recognized as a small cleft in the second month. In the third month the clitoris almost resembles the erect male member, so that when viewed from the side, the female embryo could be confused with the male embryo. Soemmerring refers to his "Description of Miscarriages" (1791), in which he found that female fetuses are more likely to be lost, a proportion in premature birth that is also true in *de embryonibus monstrosis*.

The non-genital sexual characteristics, he says, are much more visible than the genitals. But nowhere has he read of this 'significant' sex difference in fetuses from other authors, although these features are scarcely absent in any embryo, however small and rotten, unless the object is clearly a monster. The most significant difference lies in the structure of the thorax, which in the female embryo becomes narrower like an amphora and its shoulders correspondingly more sloping. Not only does the abdomen begin higher up, but it is so curved that the genitals are like little sacks; if one dares to speak metaphorically - according to Soemmerring - they look like a tumor (*tumidulum diceres*). The gender can also be identified by the shape of the head, the strength of the hands, the forearms and the heels. Here the anatomist is speaking a few years before Goethe coined the word "morphology." The embryos give him a welcome opportunity to examine the characteristics of the fair sex, produced by the dissector, in their prenatal destiny. I know the type of this "desired seeing" from earlier anatomists, but it was not then a question of sex difference, whether the beak-mouthed children observed by Kerckring or the female eggs of Govrard Bidloo that were documented as having been seen. Despite his readings of

Kant, Soemmerring still inspires the anatomical *libido videndi*, the visual curiosity from the *Theatrum Anatomicum*.

Iconological interpretation

I arrive at completely different insights if I do not concern myself with the explicit motives of the inquiring gaze at the penis or heels, and if I do not deal with the poetic legends accompanying the tablets, but rather pursue the question of how Soemmerring himself wanted to shape the process of scientific illustration. We know his opinion about this, because he sums it up succinctly in the introduction to the *Icones*.

First, Soemmerring wonders why the embryonic form has not been "seen" so far. What prejudices prevented even anatomists from wanting to recognize the embryo as a coming child? According to Soemmerring, "God knows what old wives' tales mislead not only lay people but also artists who consider the form of the human embryo to be repulsive, even unbearable or monstrous."[18] That is the first reason why "what was hidden in the womb" remained excluded from the anatomical representation. Soemmerring names the old traditional reluctance to perceive the *forma substantialis* of man in pre-childhood stages. He takes note of the willingness to expect anything and everything surprising from the womb, and to take it for a monster if it does not look like a child.

Finally, he names a fourth reason that had previously made it difficult to see: an intentional looking away. What midwives brought to doctors, what was kept in cabinets of curiosities and anatomy rooms, and what had faded in spirits of wine, could hardly arouse admiration: "They don't want to see (*intueri*) what corresponds to the order of nature, but what corresponds to their opinion: so they despise not only the rotten and spoiled fruit they lay their hands on, but even

18 Soemmerring, *Icones*, foreword.

those most perfect for their stage." Soemmerring argues for the possibility that a being can appear morphologically different at different moments in its development and yet appear in all its beauty.

The choice of specimens is thus guided by the perception of their "beauty." The anatomist deliberately restrains the draftsman's attention: the position of the fetal limbs is left "as the homunculi were left to me."[19] But in no way are the wrinkles, swellings, and disfigurements, which result from the storage in Schnaps, slavishly reproduced or made to look ridiculous[20]: only what the anatomist recognizes as "significant" should be made visible by the draftsman. Soemmerring wants *effigies*, that is, a portrait, only not at the expense of fine details. But an *archetypus* should also be depicted: "I placed them all in such a way that the light falls on them at an angle of 40 degrees, and my draftsman was primarily confronted by the head, forehead, nose, cheeks, mouth, the shape of the chest and the genitals."[21] With these precautions, Soemmerring wants a paradoxical combination: the accuracy of a unique portrait and the depiction of a type.

In order to realize this paradoxical combination of individuality and type, he must, three decades before the very first photograph by Daguèrre, shut the eye in the production of scientific imaging. He breaks with the anatomical Renaissance tradition, which wanted to convey an image of the body

19 Ibid.

20 In his treatise, *Illustrations of the human organ of hearing*, Frankfurt/M., 1806, Soemmerring requested such corrections in anatomical objects to render them true to life. It is essential "for the connection of the representative parts as they occur in life, to depict nothing dried up, shriveled, twisted, shifted, torn or in any way distorted, furthermore, to select only that form from among many which seemed to be the most excellent or most perfect, in short, the normal form." See also, Armin Geus. Christian Koeck (1758-1818), the illustrator for Samuel Thomas Soemmerring, in *Samuel Thomas Soemmerring und die Gelehrten der Goethezeit,* edited by G.Mann and F. Dumont. Stuttgart 1985, pp. 263-278.

21 Soemmerring, *Icones*, foreword.

according to the rules of central perspective, giving the viewer's eye the same impression as if the *objectum* were lying in front of him. Inspired by an exchange of views between his older friend Petrus Camper and the Leiden anatomist Bernhard Siegfried Albinus, Soemmerring regards "perspective" as the form in which illusion is brought into the picture. The draftsman Christian Koeck, whom he trained for years, is not supposed to reproduce what his eye sees, but he is supposed to create an outline of the fetus after architectural-geometric surveying (*more geometrico)*. He does not want to represent the object as he or the draftsman sees it, but rather he wants to have the object measured and the measurement results given graphic expression. The draftsman must locate each point of the object through a double grid, aiming at each detail and drawing it as if seen at right angles from a great distance. This allows the object to be represented as it were, in itself, since it is no longer related to the viewer's eye in perspective. Soemmerring wants a *simulacrum des objectes* and not a facsimile of what the eye sees. He does not want an image, but a construct. He knows that the figures he has had engraved can never be seen that way with the naked eye. The simulacrum creates a new kind of objectivity: a forcibly distanced view of objects and also of their relationships to each other.[22]

22 I can only hint at the history of graphic depiction methods, especially the contrast between perspective and a-perspectival depiction. Leon Alberti hatched to make the source of light visible. By choosing (1) a horizon and (2) a vanishing point, he created a fac-simile of sensual perception. Leonardo already criticized him, because what is far away blurs, fades in color and what is close becomes *artificium* through this one eyed-ness (Einäugikeit). And yet, at least in anatomical graphics, perspective prevails up to Albinus. Simultaneously, also with Alberti, isometric drawing of architectural structures, i.e., drawing corresponding to measurements, began. The draftsman does not set his chin (*fixiert sein Kinn*) but sits artificially at the greatest distance. His vision moves to a point at right angles to the sighted point on the object. One of the means of doing this is the double grid, whereby the first grid with small, the second with larger net squares, are positioned at such a distance from each other that the two frames coincide with the line the draftsman has chosen. What matters to me is the importance given by some anatomists at this time to the contrast between perspective illustration and architectural construction. Later in the century, anatomical specimens are very often drawn from photographs for textbooks.

Soemmerring thoroughly robs the sensual act of seeing of its innocence and demands the contemplation of a constructed "reality". He agrees with Peter Camper that central perspective serves to carry the distortion inherent in sensory perception into the picture. To exclude the sensual and therefore the deceptive perception of the observer, he does not want perspective but isometric projection, i.e., a reconstructed "reality". His pre-childhood human series from 1799 only seems understandable to me because of this desire for a viewpoint without a point-of-view.

The metamorphosis of the unborn child into a "fetus" begins with the planimetric-architectural (*planimetrisch*) drawing method used by Soemmerring. From that moment on, the depiction of the fetus remains technogenic, as far as I have been able to trace into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The visual concept of the unborn as a "pre-child" being can only be understood, from Koeck's drawings, later microphotography, and X-ray fluoroscopy to ultrasound, if one understands it as a history of the interpretation of mechanically produced records.

History of gender relations as the basis for a historical understanding of woman today

I began with a history of the representation of the unborn, an iconographic history which has already been studied by many authors. As we have seen, the body of the unborn was often a surface onto which researchers projected ideas about the special position and competence that nature had assigned to women.

I unreservedly accept that the history of the scientific production of concepts and ideas about the female body has been a basis for the legal, social, economic, and cultural position of women since the later eighteenth century. It has also progressively marked women's self-image and experience. The scientific characterization of female "biology" is and remains

a basis for the historical investigation of group identity and of the formation of interests, as Karin Hausen puts it. This remained so until the late 19th century.[23]

I would like to complement, or add a layer to, this research into the historical genesis of women's gender perception, based on experienced discrimination, however necessary it may be. I am trying to engage with that disembodiment of perception and that sentimental understanding of scientific fact that Soemmerring's *Icones* gave me the opportunity to discuss. Today, in my opinion, the historicity of a tangible, sensual difference between woman and man is threatened by their abstract reduction to two historical agents. This difference is increasingly being formulated in a deconstructivist fashion, so that it is disguised or explicitly merged into a system-theoretical binomial.

I am of the opinion that around 1800 a polarization takes place in the sensual perception of the sexes that, paradoxically, begins to produce an abstract leveling of what had formerly been understood to be their difference. I consider it the central theme of gender history to follow the consequences of this process in the various areas of society up to the present. The type of "gender" that emerges is modern. The divergence between the experience of quickening by which a woman once knew her pregnancy, and what contemporary people take for granted about "sexuality" and the being of the fetus, has a history.

23 *Des deutschen Hausvaters Furcht vor der Emanzipation der Weiber*. In: *Freiheit – Gleichheit – Schwesterlichkeit. Männer und Frauen zur Zeit der Französischen Revolution*. Hessische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung. Wiesbaden 1989, S. 122–148

The Personal Decision in a World Dominated by Communication*

by Ivan Illich

Excuse my behavior.[1] It is they who want to tie me to a microphone but if I want to walk, I will walk. The rule is that whoever wants to, can interrupt my presentation [and] may do so at any time.

I want to thank Aldo [Zanchetta] and Don Achille Rossi, parish priest of Città di Castello. I have always admired him for the incredibly local *L'Altrapagina*, which is known in Mexico and in Germany. He always addresses the problems, the most general possible questions, from the local point of view. It is in Citta di Castello that I met Aldo. We quickly understood each other, and here I am.

I told Aldo that I will make three manuscripts available to him. An introduction by me, an article by the professor of "business administration", Sajay Samuel, —that native from India who is sitting there, and one from Silja Samerski.[2] I cannot give these manuscripts now for two reasons: that guy over there[3] has not yet finished the article we want to include on the decision from the managers' point of view; we have not yet

* Illich gave this talk — it would be his last— in Italian at the Scuola per la Pace (School for Peace) of the Lucca Province on October 2, 2002. Aldo Zanchetta arranged the meeting which an overflow audience attended. Paolo Coluccia transcribed the lecture from the DVD. http://digilander.libero.it/paolocoluccia (paconet@libero.it). Translation into English was a collective effort. The translation sought to preserve the flavor of the oral remarks. Accordingly, we added footnotes to clarify the lived contexts of some of his statements and [...] brackets to improve the readability of his spoken words.

1 He takes off his shoes while some technicians adjust the microphone.

2 German scholar who was part of the Illich circle.

3 He points to Sajay Samuel.

Illich, I. The Personal Decision in a World Dominated by Communication.
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 98 - 110

found the translator from German for the article of Silja, who is a geneticist and deals with the decision that forces women to undergo prenatal genetic consultation in certain countries.

I believe what I want to discuss with you is important and can be formulated in such a way as to draw public attention to the topic I want to present.

I have decided to speak freely, recalling my notes. That way it will be easier for you to interrupt me. One more thing: if my voice gets too low or if my pronunciation is such that I am difficult to understand ... please give me a sign! I have this cancer here that makes the mouth so painful that I cannot simultaneously think intelligently and wear dentures. Thank God at a certain time of my life I took Sanskrit courses. I submitted to that test, to that exercise of the saints almost thirty years ago, and so I started formulating sentences even without teeth, but please, protest if I am not understandable!

The matter I want to submit to your examination is the way in which so-called "communication" makes, for example, what Saint Ignatius would have called *electio*, more and more difficult. I am an admirer of the exercises of Saint Ignatius not only as a historian but also because of their good effects on me.

The exercises of St. Ignatius are an extraordinary ascetic-mystical innovation. They give you a method to find the will of God, which St. Ignatius names the call of God. They also are a method for the *electio*— [which refers to] what I want to do now so I can obey this vocation [the call of God]. For me they are also a demonstration of what is freely chosen in the sense of *electio*, that is, [of a personal decision] determined by a *telos*, by the good.

The thesis I want to discuss is the following: the more intensely all my thinking and my knowledge is the result of what is called communication today, the less I can decide, or rather make an *electio* of my life that is based on my knowledge, on my senses, on my common sense, on my own ex-

perience, on the circle [of my friends], on the *con-spiration* with friends — [all of] which allow me to sense the good. I want to make people think about the implicit danger that communication beyond a certain intensity poses to autonomous knowledge on which sovereign freedom is founded. Such freedom, shaped by our classical tradition and, in a completely new form by the Christian tradition, has formed the Western culture in which we live.

I want to proceed in the following way: first, I want to start by elaborating, a little more, the idea that Aldo has so cleverly hinted at in a few words of his introduction. It seems to me that it is important to untie, to disentangle [two ideas] — communication and peace — [but] what I can say here in Lucca is already more difficult to talk about in California, and even more so in your India[4] or in your Islamic world[5] of which I cannot speak because they do not have our tradition.

I will give you a small summary of my argument: in what sense do I allow myself to talk about this untying, this separation between peace and communication? Why do I show that communication beyond a certain intensity becomes inhuman? Aldo said it very well: "dis-incarnated" was his phrase — with which he surprised me, and I immediately went to write it down. Dis-incarnated is not the same as virtual, which does not exist. I want to make it clear that I will be speaking in a form — do not be scandalized, please — that is extravagant, from *extra-vagare* [to wander outside]. To wander [*vagare*] is a beautiful concept. In medieval Latin [it implies] giving oneself to the moment, leisureliness ...for which monasteries existed. [In] Saint Augustine, the word *extravagare* [suggests] to take leisure; to look at how you live today, here, from the outside. In this spirit, I want to speak extrava-

4 Refers to Sajay Samuel.

5 Refers to Samar Farage.

gantly. I also want to make people understand that, above all, communication is an attack, it almost always implies an attack on the common sense.

Common sense was previously a sense. It really existed as you can see in Leonardo's paintings and in discussions of his faith. Whether we have this sense in the pituitary gland or close to the heart [was debated]. Today, medicine no longer knows, anatomy no longer knows [the common sense], which was the sense for sensibly judging what was good, convenient, natural. In these circumstances, I speak extravagantly of the decrease or disappearance of common sense as a specific sense.

Then I will tell a parable. I will speak of a sentence that I had on my desk, a copy of an old document that I lent to someone who did not return it to me, and I returned to the archives of Spain to make myself another copy — I now know it by heart. [It is] a phrase from Philip II, King of Spain —a parable. A parable is not a similitude, a parable is not an analogy. As we know it from the studies of Holy Scripture, it is, in the best way, a jest, a joke, it is a Jewish, Arab joke. Or, like when I had to prepare homilies, I tried to read the Sunday Gospel until, at a certain moment, I started laughing and then I said to myself: "Now I understand!"

I want to tell you a parable about Philip II to make you understand what sovereignty is. I think it is very important to talk as concretely about communication as [we speak] about the extraordinary attack by Bush against state sovereignty right now, representing America as a guardian of the world. Why do sovereign states need a policeman beyond sovereigns to exist? I must talk about this because it seems to me that communication, used beyond a certain intensity and without ascetic self-control, [poses] a similar danger to the sovereign self.

For this reason, my next point will be a questioning, I don't like the word problematization. When I was a child, problems were seen only in mathematics, when I was 20 years

old, 25 years old I learned that poor children had problems; today everything is problematic, isn't it? [I want to question the idea of decision-making or self-determination] because the difficulty of so-called self-determination is it claims to require continuous information or communication.

And to finish, I end with a reflection on how the words and objects function in our modern society. The best way to quickly understand where I want to end up [is to say that words and objects function] magically, religiously.[6] I don't want to be a religious man. I am the descendant of the martyrs who, according to Roman law which was very solid and precise, were thrown to the beasts as truly irreligious [*veri irreligiosi*]; they were people who somehow understood that Jesus freed us from what was then, as today, called religion.

Let's go to the first point, to disentangle [peace and communication]. I was asked to give an opening speech for a new peace center in Japan, one like all the centers for peace in Asia and Africa. They wanted someone from another part of the Third World and so they found Ivan Illich of Cuernavaca. Obviously, I'm not from there, but I put on my guayabera –the Mexican shirt– and I went to talk about the link between development and peace.

I had special difficulties in explaining what sense peace has today in the West, in Europe, in the Christian liturgical tradition. The Roman 'pax'... *Pah*! They needed the flag and the weight of weapons. The Christians arrived with a gesture that is disgusting in Japan —this is why I had difficulties —what in Latin was called the *osculum*, kiss, or better, *con-spirazione*, one of the culminating parts of the Mass, which was the kiss of the altar and then the sharing of this kiss; the common kiss [which] made the Holy Spirit

6 Illich does not develop this point at length in this talk. However, see his remarks in *The Rivers North of the Future,* (ed) David Cayley (Anansi Press, 2005), pp.158-161 on amoeba words and 'visiotypes' as icons.

present for the equal participation of everyone, whether king or water bearer, before the *comestio* [communion]. The idea of this *conspiratio* was the basis for the foundation of a liturgical and real community. Even the church fathers had difficulties with it. There is a nice passage by Tertullian who says that the Roman matrons cannot be sent to these celebrations, exposing them to this danger of conspiracy. Very soon it was called the 'pax' —our peace. If I speak of the tradition that I believe is common to us, but it certainly is mine, the conspiracy gives the sense of peace that is not Roman, not pagan, and not philosophically conceivable: the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian, who communicates it, who participates in it within the community. Thus, as a first question: what do we mean by peace? Peace, in this sense, is the one strong word with which the atmosphere of friendship created among equals has been appropriately named.[7]

I will not comment further on this point because it is sufficient for me to make you think about the difficulty that the intensity of communication, of the media, causes to the experience of personal sovereignty. "But Ivan, what are you talking about?" I am 77 years old. I remember in 1962 at the University of Chicago, when it was still considered criminal to doubt Development, and the *Populorum Progressio* was prepared with all respect and love, a small, recently appointed Marxist professor who was annoyed [by my criticisms] said: "Illich, you are not on the same wavelength as me, do not think you have communicated with me!" I thought he wanted to offend me, and I told him: "But I'm not a radio transmitter, it's Ivan who speaks to you, I'm not a message that communicates to you, I have something to tell you."

7 See "The cultivation of conspiracy" in *The Challenges of Ivan Illich*, (eds) Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, (SUNY Press, 2002), p.238.

When I utter them, my sentences are all a *copula*, you know what a *copula* is, don't you? In English I can say *copulate* and people immediately understand [the relation] between the subject and the predicate. Instead, communication replaces this vital, fruitful relationship with the mathematician "equal to" sign, with =. I was trying to explain to him that I wasn't trying to communicate with him. Until 1962, despite speaking to audiences of various kinds for 15 years, I had not yet met someone who would consider me a communicator. The difficulty, gentlemen in the other room [refers to the audience in the second room opened for the unexpectedly large number who came to hear Illich], physically fearsome for me, is to have this schizoid situation of speaking with [some] people I can see and, if I want, feel with my nose [deeply inhales], or touch... and to others who are somewhere else! This is not a point about making philosophical statements concerning the content of information, the accessibility of information, or the criticisms of receiving information. Instead, I want to make people think about the necessity to abstain, about the desire to renounce information, as a contemporary form of celebrating Friday. Meat is not bad, eating it is very good and is tasty, but it is renounced for ascetic reasons.

I want to talk about the structural danger communication poses to the certainty of seeing you here — it is one thing to talk to you here than to talk to people there [referring to the people in the other room]. When did I understand this? When this little girl said to me: "Do you know uncle? I saw Kennedy discuss - the President was already dead - with E.T." I don't know the name of E.T.[8] But the girl no longer distinguished between what you [Aldo] said and what does not exist. I repeat her sentence because it is stronger than anything I would have dared to say. If I make my decisions based on things that were said to me, about which I must be educated,

8 Mimes the extraterrestrial figure of the eponymous film.

that other people know better than me and I don't know well, or at least not as well as they do, then the whole foundation of my epistemic being is in hearsay, which is precisely what we exclude as testimony in a democracy.

Ivan, where are you going?

I told you that I will tell you a parable. Looking at this little note, of a codex from the mid-16th century, which I had on my desk, and which then disappeared, which had been, not stolen, but not returned. Felipe II, successor of Charles of Spain, was a pious man. He got up at midnight, went to the chapel for an hour and then to his desk for an hour or two. A king goes to the desk! It was a very new thing. You, Sajay, made me understand that the idea of bureaucracy —which is much later than the time of Philip II— is a little crazy. I looked at this desk, in front of which he stood for two hours and made the final decisions on what his governors or viceroys asked of him from all over the world.

The file that particularly interested me came from Peru. In Peru, as you know, the horse, the cow, the cattle, the donkey are important imports into the new world, just as tomatoes or agave are important exports to the other side. The presentations, "Jesus among the agaves...", for example, make me laugh. The question posed there was about the right quantity of land and donkeys that should be given to emigrants who came to Peru from Spain. The viceroy gave them land and then the emigrants wanted to have donkeys or mules, they wanted them ... I don't have to explain why a donkey is used—although I did recently see, in a certain part of Italy when I visited a field, that a donkey could not be found. I wanted to show a German, who in 25 years had never seen a donkey, what a donkey was and, in Italy, you could not find a donkey! Yet, I speak of an animal whose use is obvious, at least in this certain cultural context. In all cases - do you understand me there, do I speak clearly? - the question was whether up to 4 donkeys could be allowed or if the governor was limited to 2 donkeys for the sus-

tenance of each family in Peru from Spain.

And on the margin of the document, Phillip II writes - I say it in Spanish: "*Dos Basta*!" [Two, enough!] The reasons were ecological, essentially. "*Dos Basta*!" And then, as he does for every other decision, in this codex, this file, he writes in his own hand, in a chapel: "*Así vos dice, con su reale gana. Yo el re.*" He goes to the next point, makes another decision, and once more writes: "*Así vos dice* - so he tells you - *con su reale gana.*" Help me to translate here, because the *ganas*... the desire, the will, the... how does it translate... *ganas*... autonomy, the will… it is very modern, it is a word that every peasant would understand... with his sovereign desire... *Yo el re* [I, the King]

You see, I present this to you as a parable of sovereignty making an election: *Dos, Basta*! As for the child watching television: two hours, Basta! For any decision, *Yo*! The *Yo*. The I, which can be spoken of in Italian with the word Ego — I personally met this Viennese doctor, Freud, who made the Ego into a substantive, a substance. And now, these fantasies about the fetus, about a substantive life, about a substantive 'I' are typical… conception(s) typical of the modern world.

'I' — the first person singular. Linguists tell me that the one who speaks uses the first-person singular 'I' [he points his index finger towards his chest]; the speaker tells you he speaks; or this [pushing the arms backwards outside the chest and making a sound with his voice]: eh! Linguists use pages to describe it, but essentially it is here [inside] or there [outside]. In different types of languages, the 'I' refers to something which is not a word, it cannot be said with a noun, nor can it be said with a name. If I say [imitates a child's voice]: "Little Ivan wants", evidently, I use a name, but we know that I am not yet old enough to have a...

To speak clearly, maybe it's easier to explain it as I explain it to my Bremen students. In Italian it is called a *pronome*, in English it is called a pro-noun, in German it is said

fur-wort; perhaps with a little exaggeration I can say that the 'I' stands for a word, because there is no word to speak about this apophatic, unspeakably concrete being. [The "I" is] beyond description, just as the Greek Fathers considered God in apophatic theology, without words. The creation of the *Ego*, the creation of personality or, worse still, of identity, is a phenomenon of the twentieth century that profoundly undermines the sovereignty of the first person — the one who has, today it is called a "nose", but for two millennia it was called 'the common sense' of knowing what is good —and replaces the good with value.

Why? My teachers and colleagues whom I respect continue to speak of Christian values, instead of talking about the revelation, the gift, the *bonum* that Jesus opened to us. But they lower the good to values that can be positive or negative, to value that can be calculated as more or less. Why do I say this? Because the extravagant way in which I look at the relationship between election and freedom on the one hand and decision and information on the other hand requires that I speak to you of the threat to the sovereignty of knowledge. That's how it is for me! Leave me in peace! I don't need scientific foundations! [Common sense judgment] would be better, superior, for what I will decide.

But now, the difficulty is this. In the booklet that I want to give to Aldo, to this bookseller here, I want to question what is called the consultation, I think that in Italian we speak of *consulta*? *Consultazione*? Consultations are of all kinds — before the operation of her breast, my nose, her abortion, to buy a house, to get married, about bad dreams. In the past ten years, a profession that did not exist before has multiplied in society — statistics are difficult to obtain because I would want to equate consultants with educators— but the jobs for consultants [have increased]!

Now, what I want to subject for your study is the in-

terpretation of two documents, which are the result of the conversations... —*mamma mia*! [looks at the clock] it's already 32 minutes! — two documents reporting a conversation that I never expected. You [Aldo] said that I've disappeared in the past ten years. Well, thirty years ago, when I decided not to function as a symbol of unity because I had become scandalous and because I was recognized all over the world I almost ceased to speak in religious circles, both Catholic, and non-Catholic, and simultaneously I almost never did an interview on television, radio ... nothing! But in the past ten years, I have reserved every free hour for conversation with a dozen people who have become friends. One is the young Indian [Sajay], who renounced his professorship to devote himself to studying how and why the business school trains the people who earn the most money as officials. Business administrators are people who earn more than half a million euros a year - it's a little crazy to think, but that's it! The business school curriculum is essentially the training of decision makers, consultants, is there a better word in Italian than *decisiori*?

Silja [Samerski], of the same age as Sajay, is not here today because she is in Germany. She has listened to forty very precisely recorded interviews of pregnant women by genetic counselors in a way that makes me tremble. She shows how the principles applied at the Harvard Business School to train decision makers are used to transform a pregnant woman who is awaiting a child into a decision maker who, based on probable information from a test and follow-up test results, identifies herself with a certain point on the probability curves to transform birth into a decision, so that the child can then say: "Mom, I was a good decision!"

Frightening!

Based on what? Based on the communication of information, based on a knowledge that is not here [indicates the nose], nor here [indicates the brain], and following Leonardo,

not even here [indicates the heart], but produced by university departments. The woman is told that the modern woman makes autonomous decisions, makes her own decisions. This completely ignores that this woman, and perhaps even mother, felt sovereign, not in governing Peru, but in directing her life in the same way as did Felipe II. Today, these women act, they are trained to act, according to rules used in the market by decision makers trained in the business school to make decisions based on statistical probabilities.

What a horror!

In the best of cases, statistics tells me about the incidence of a certain phenomenon in a chosen population, it never tells me anything about the individual. For the individual, whether they are affected or unaffected by that phenomenon, remains a 50 percent chance. How is it possible that the woman believes that her autonomy, personality, and individuality is the result of a decision based on probability supervised by a counselor? Only a society that has killed the common sense can arrive at this point. I have seen that the Council of Europe has granted 172 million euros for genetic research to protect the European genome as the basis of Europe's dignity![9]

I return to the theme. Under consultation, you must make the decision based on a probability. A probability is calculated based on a population. This introduces the concept of risk. No new danger is identified by this information. The danger has always existed. Risk - a fundamentally mathematical and statistical concept - today awaits not only people like the father of the family who has insurance, but also the student who goes to the student advisor to choose if he must take mathematics or languages.

Let's go back to the question. Ivan, with his friends, wants to make thinkable and criticizable the idea that the central danger to be overcome in the use of communications is

9 Illich slaps his forehead in amazement.

not their content, the access to produce them, or to use them as industrial products. [Instead], Ivan and his friends want to make credible that the intensity of dependence on communication extinguishes the sovereignty which is rooted in the corporeal senses. The senses are critically verified by the common sense for what is good, in opposition to what is of value. For this reason, and for me at least and for my friends, communication destroys the possibility to believe that peace today is my responsibility, that I can make peace flower in a group with whom I meet face to face, that peace is based on conspiracy —on the creation of a hospitable atmosphere, the hospitable atmosphere.

Therefore, reflection on the renunciation, as much as possible, of exposing oneself to communication because [of its danger] to each individual, is one of the most important topics to discuss in a group — which seems to me the activity, the principal activity for Aldo and this beautiful group formed here in Lucca.

Thank you for your patience.

Guarding our Senses in the Age of the Show:
Against the Burning Out of Hearts

by David Cayley

I live with the refusal not only to say certain things but also to use certain words or to permit certain feelings to creep into my heart…Reflection on certain things we take for granted is, in my opinion, acceptance of self-destruction, of burning out your heart.

Ivan Illich[1]

At the beginning of 1972, I became friends with a woman who worked part-time taking tickets at Toronto's now demolished Towne Cinema, which was then showing one of that year's most talked about films, *A Clockwork Orange*. One day she told me a story which had a big influence on me. During a matinee screening of the film, a spectator in the balcony had become violently disturbed and appeared to be undergoing some sort of nervous breakdown. Emergency services were called, and the man was taken away. The film resumed, but, before it was over, my friend observed a steady stream of the remaining audience members also leaving the cinema. She surmised that the man's outburst had shifted their perspective on what they were watching, and why they were watching it, and sapped their desire to continue.

A Clockwork Orange is a dystopia in which a charismatic delinquent, inspired by Beethoven, whose music is prominent in the soundtrack, leads a gang of self-styled "droogs" who randomly commit graphically depicted rapes, beatings and other acts of what they call "ultra-violence." Along with contemporary films like Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* and Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs,* it pioneered a cinematic style in which the explicit and unsparing portrayal

1 David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, House of Anansi, 1992, p. 127

David Cayley, dccayley@gmail.com
Cayley, D. Guarding our Senses in the Age of the Show:
Against the Burning Out of Hearts. Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 111 - 127

of violence justified itself as both a salutary honesty and as declaration of artistic freedom: what can be shown must be shown. The film was widely praised for its moral and aesthetic daring. Some demurred – Pauline Kael in her *New Yorker* review called it "pornographic" – but Vincent Canby, *The New York Times* critic was more representative in writing, after the film had won *The New York Film Critics' Award*, that it was "a brilliant…work" and, though also "dangerous," only "dangerous in a way that brilliant things sometimes are."[2] Discussion continued as to whether the movie was an edifying depiction of contemporary nihilism, as well as a revelation of the violent instability at the heart of Western classical music, or just a cheap thrill, but, either way, the price of admission to the debate was that one had to see the film.

It would probably be too much to say that the unknown spectator in the balcony, pushed over the edge by *A Clockwork Orange,* changed my life, but the story of his breakdown was certainly the seed around which a new attitude began to crystallize. I had grown up on the idea that art's proper direction is always towards explicitness and disinhibition, and that decorum is usually only a timid fetter on artistic freedom. I rejoiced in my right to read formerly censored texts like Joyce's *Ulysses,* Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, or Miller's *Tropic of Cancer (*though this last title, I remember, remained hidden against my adolescent eyes in my father's sock drawer – even after it was published by the Grove Press). Along with everyone else I knew, I was against the Motion Picture Association of America's hypocritical Hays Code, which had protected movie-goers from sex and unpunished vice until, already in tatters, it was finally abolished in 1968. I knew the heroic history of the many artistic avant-gardes who had tried to shock their bourgeois publics out of their fatal complacency. But now I began to wonder, for the first time, if there were

2 Vincent Canby, "Orange – Disorienting But Human Comedy," *The New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1972.

things which it would be better not to say or see. I asked the question mainly in relation to arts like television and cinema, arts in which it is possible to produce a semblance of reality that goes far beyond what can be done in media whose artifice is more apparent, like theatre or literature. Movies, for example, have an uncanny resemblance to dreams. They are shown to mass audiences in darkened cinemas in much the same way as individual fantasies are projected within the darkened mind during sleep. What if movies, because of this dream-like verisimilitude, slip past whatever defenses we may have erected and become a permanent part of our mental furniture, regardless of what we may consciously think of them? Or, put another way, what if the preponderance of our experience consists of things that have been devised and designed for us, rather than of things that have actually happened to us in the everyday course of events?

These question arise in response to two outstanding features of our contemporary situation: the first is the technologies of visualization that now create representation of such life-like plausibility that their artificiality is effectively hidden; the second is the sheer volume of designed experience to which people are now exposed. Here the focus expands far beyond the movies to include all forms of premeditated and professionalized communication – whether it's a tourist destination, a newscast, or a carefully curated brand. I began to wonder, not just whether specific works like *A Clockwork Orange* might overwhelm, disorient and desensitize their audiences, but also whether there might be a critical threshold between spontaneous and simulated experience, one that we cross at our peril. Can planned or media-ted experience, beyond a certain intensity, so overshadow any possible spontaneity that true surprise becomes unimaginable?

My *Clockwork Orange* epiphany changed my practice with regard to movies. I now asked myself whether a certain

theme or story was something I wanted to take in and was prepared to live with. This might sound a little prissy, but it was, in fact, quite a rough and ready rule – it had to be since it partly involved discerning the character of movies and other entertainments in advance. I subscribed then, as now, to Jesus' teaching that a person is defiled not by what goes into their mouth [or eyes or ears] but by what comes out.[3] I only tried to avoid exposing myself unnecessarily to sights that I thought would dull my sensibilities.

The possibility and desirability of assimilation became my crucial criterion. Assimilation, as I am using the word here, refers to the way in which new experience or information attaches to the existing and evolving structure of a given person's understanding. Only what fits this evolving structure and can find a site to which to attach can be assimilated. What does not fit may challenge and alter the structure, if its dissonance is sufficiently pointed and potent, but a great deal of what is taken in in a media-saturated society is simply debris. It is not assimilated – there are limits to what we can assimilate – but neither is it harmlessly shed, like rain off a roof. What happens to it then? Perhaps we can say that it becomes part of our unconscious experience – unassimilated, unacknowledged, but still somehow there – part of that large and novel class of experiences that have happened to us without our ever having *had* them in the usual sense.

To be concrete, let's say that I am washing the dishes, and I hear via CBC Radio that thirteen people have died in a train derailment in India. This can mean nothing to me, since I know nothing of the place, the people or the circumstances, and yet it is supremely meaningful to the people involved and has been presented to me as such – as news I should know. Either I must slough off the information – be it only by the unnoticed, infinitesimal gesture of hardening my heart against

3 Matthew 15:11

the suffering this must have entailed – or I must pretend that I care, by passing the story on or tut-tutting about rail safety in India. My point is that you're stuck with what you see and hear, whether it's the news or *A Clockwork Orange*, and often in the form of unconscious images that you don't even know you have, let alone where they came from. If you watch or listen to the news, then you must process the news, either by assimilating it or by finding a way to ignore or displace it in a way that must finally involve creating a protective layer of psychic callous.

One way of characterizing our time is as the epoch at which progress turned back on itself and began to consume its own substance. Modernity, taking its inspiration from the Roman Church, has believed that humanity is making steady, if jerky, moral and economic progress. It's my contention that this progress has now, in effect, gone into reverse. The future is a nightmare – whether one foresees ecological meltdown, by war or industrial overreach, or imagines a humanity saved by re-engineering itself and its environment. Ivan Illich, in his books of the early 1970's, argued that modern institutions had reached and were rapidly surpassing a threshold at which they would begin to get in their own way and defeat their own purposes. They were facing the onset of what he called "paradoxical counter-productivity."

The logic, or tendency, that Illich identified is apocalyptic. It is my view, which I won't argue here, that Christianity is apocalyptic by its very inspiration – the appearance of God in human form invents history as a one-way street that may lead to heaven or hell but cannot be stopped or reversed.

Apocalypse is a Greek word meaning revelation or unveiling, and I think it precisely describes our current reality. The inevitability of disclosure is a constant theme in the New Testament. Jesus says that he will "utter things hidden since the creation of the world"; that there is "nothing hidden"

that will not be "made manifest," nothing "secret" that will not "come to light"; that "the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed…" etc.[4] Thinkers like Ivan Illich and Rene Girard have recognized that this logic of discovery plays out over the course of Western civilization and now begins to hit a wall. This tendency, whose accumulating momentum makes it a fate, is evident across the board in our time: in economies, built only to grow, that must now stop growing; in an artistic avant-garde that has run out of taboos to break, but doesn't know what else to do; in an intellectual culture built on demystification that now generates nothing but obscurity. Those hidden things that were to be revealed have all been brought to light, but somehow remain hidden in plain view. The habit of "going forward" dies hard, and no one wants to be the first to say "turn back." To turn back is to be "reactionary" – a path from which the spectres of *blut und boden* are surely enough to warn us away. This apocalyptic character of our time, I would argue, makes special demands on us – the first being to recognize that this is, in fact, our situation: bewildered, disoriented, our path approaching a wall, our habits quite unsuitable for the task we are called on to perform. There is a scene in *Don Quixote* when the Don and Sancho enter a culde-sac which ends at the wall of a church, and, when they can go no further, the Don remarks drily, "We've come up against the Church, Sancho." It's a resonant line and one that fits our situation. The many churches that descended from "the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church" with which Don Quixote collided have failed, but we have no other.[5]

A Clockwork Orange is just one of many possible examples of paradoxical counter-productivity at work in media. What was intended to purify sensibility was at that same time

4 Matthew 13:36, Mark 4:22; Luke 2:35

5 The quoted words appear in the Nicene Creed.

poisoning it, according to my reading of the parable of the Unknown Spectator. The means to shock people awake had instead begun to shock them into insensibility.

This is a specimen of the much more general dilemma of how to live in a *technogenic* society. A fancy word, I know, but one that I want to use in a fairly precise sense. Technology is the origin or genesis of the account contemporary people give of themselves. It informs our stance – how we walk and talk and hold ourselves – and it informs our self-image – who we think we are and what we think we are made of. This observation is, in one sense, a truism – a statement so obviously and so universally true as to be unremarkable. "Artificiality," as Walter Ong says, "is natural to human beings," and "there is," as John Durham Peters adds, "no humanity without arts."[6] In this sense, we have been products of technology ever since we began to talk, walk upright and make fire. But, to see our artificiality as inherent and constitutive is not to say that it has no limit, no threshold at which this inherent artificiality exceeds its proper boundary, no point-of-no-return at which it becomes total and begins to enclose existence as a mirror in which we can see nothing but our own reflection. I will call this imagined point of balance the technogenic threshold.

A Clockwork Orange crossed this threshold in 1971, and, thanks to the bad conscience generated in me by the tale of the Unknown Spectator, I was able to perceive it. The question then became how to preserve the integrity and receptivity of my imagination, using that word in its broadest sense as standing for the very capacity to form images and ideas. Beyond the technogenic threshold, I supposed, I would no longer be able to shape this faculty for myself. A Clockwork Orange and its ilk would already have shaped my

6 John Durham Peters, The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media, University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 233 and Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, Routledge, 2002, 9. 81.

sensibility, and furnished my imagination, to a depth that would resist any attempt to discern what was moving me.

Identifying this threshold implies no romantic notion of authenticity, as if I could, or should be able to furnish my imagination, just as I like. Media historians, from the time of Harold Innis and Eric Havelock on, have shown convincingly that media have a structuring effect on perception and cognition at all times and places. What is novel about today's media is the persuasiveness of their simulations, and the depth and extent to which they penetrate and preoccupy people. The province of Ontario, where I live, recently found it necessary to institute in law a "right to disconnect," just so its citizens could play and sleep free of the insistent nagging of their smartphones.[7] We are being remade by our media in a way that goes far beyond anything previously experienced. Prepubescent children now have their roots in the world-wide web, as much as in any local or familial ethos, or in any constraining or constitutive tradition. No ethics even remotely adequate to this situation exist. If we take ethics to mean the moral standards proper to a given *ethos*, we can see why. What is an ethos without temporal, spatial, or cultural boundaries?

I've related my intuition, in the face of the Unknown Spectator's breakdown in the balcony, that I might have to begin rethinking a lot of received, and previously hallowed, ideas about artistic vanguards, the progress of the arts, and the desideratum to continually "break new ground," "push the envelope" etc. This was the beginning of a practice which I'm reluctant to call asceticism, since there was no hair shirt, or other self-mortification involved, but for which I have as yet no better word. It began to come clear to me, only during a lengthy conversation, extending

7 Bill 27, the "Working for Workers Act," proclaimed on December 2, 2021

over many days, that I recorded with Ivan Illich in 1988.[8]

This conversation was a continuous surprise to me, but there were moments when the surprise intensified. These were moments when Illich said things that I had never before heard, or thought, but which I must have been disposed to hear, since they instantly took root in my mind. Since one of these moments forms the basis of the answer I will eventually give to the conundrum of the Unknown Spectator, I will recall it here at some length. It began with a discussion of a passage in Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) in which he predicts that, if contemporary societies continue to pursue "engineered obsolescence," they will eventually "break all bridges to a normative past."[9] I asked whether he thought this had since happened. Yes, he said, "the conceptual and perceptual topology in which I [now] live is non-continuous with the past."[10] He went on to talk about the practice of abstention and renunciation that he thought were required to live in such a world. "I live with the refusal," he told me, "not only to say certain things but also to use certain words, or to permit certain feelings to creep in my heart."

Such a refusal is necessary, he went on, in order to avoid become a "splitter" – an idea he took from Robert J. Lifton's book on the way in which Nazi doctors became capable of murdering and experimenting on prisoners while still retaining the character of affectionate fathers and husbands.[11]

8 An edited version was broadcast on Ideas as "Part Moon, Part Travelling Salesman: Conversations with Ivan Illich" at the end of 1989. A transcript is here, https://www.davidcayley.com/transcripts; the audio is here: https://www.davidcayley.com/podcasts/2014/11/6/part-moon-part-travelling-salesman-conversations-with-ivan-illich. A full transcript was published by House of Anansi in 1992 as *Ivan Illich in Conversation*.

9 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, New York: Harper and Row, 1973, p. 83

10 *Illich in Conversation*, p. 124; everything I will subsequently quote is in the six succeeding pages, so I will dispense with further notes.

11 Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*,

(The word *splitter* is Illich's, not Lifton's, but it sums up Lifton's thought.) We must decline to act as "splitters," he said, or chance "maiming our hearts." I agreed that the things of which he was speaking – genetic engineering, nuclear weapons, certain forms of extreme medical impudence – might, in one sense, constitute "deeply corrupting images" but still asked whether we oughtn't to contemplate and discuss these things insofar as they "actually exist in our world." He commended instead "horrified silence" and said that was the stance he had taken when he participated in peace demonstrations in West Germany in 1983 against the stationing of Cruise and Pershing II thermonuclear missiles there.[12]

> …at the time the Pershing missiles were to be stationed [in Germany], I made myself available to the young people, mostly high school students, who wanted to organize protests. And I said we can't protest in any other way than by standing there silently. We have nothing to say on this issue. We want to testify by our horrified silence. In horrified silence, the Turkish immigrant washerwoman and the university professor can make *exactly* the same statement, standing next to each other. As soon as you have to explain, opposition becomes again a graded, an elite affair and becomes superficial. I do not want to take part in a conspiracy of gab about peace but claim the privilege of horrified silence, in front of certain things – if I can make my horror visible.

Then came the words that I have held on to ever since – there is a real danger, he said, of people "burning out their hearts."

I mentioned earlier the New Testament teaching that

New York: Basic Books, 1984

12 https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1983/10/23/more-than-a-million-protest-missiles-in-western-europe/9d703245-36fa-40ce-8714-e281f796a472/

we are more likely to be corrupted by what we say and do than by what we hear and see. "Listen and understand," Jesus says. "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him `unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him `unclean. '"[13] This was invaluable counsel in a society preoccupied with ritual purity, but it's easily misunderstood in a modern society in which "do not be afraid" has degenerated into "what, me worry?"[14] With Illich's warning about burnt out hearts, a thought I had been trying to think since the Unknown Spectator was helped out of the Towne Cinemas suddenly became clear, urgent and articulate. The flood of prefabricated sights and sounds, words and images, in which the typically media-ted modern person stands can dull sensibility and corrode sensitivity. In this way, we can be deprived of the very faculties we need to discern the character of our world. Illich's motto was, "I fear the Lord is passing me by."[15] By this he meant that he hoped to remain alert to the prompting of each moment and aware that a moment missed might be missed forever – that our lives, in other words, have real stakes. The crucial point is that discernment of the moment of the Lord's passing, depends on the faculties by which we discern it, and these can easily be disoriented and disabled under the deluge of what French philosopher Jean Baudrillard calls the "hyper-real."

Illich did not speak by accident of the heart as the capacity endangered by "conspiracies of gab" or casual intercourse with "corrupting images." The heart, for him, is the very seat and centre of the person insofar as that person is whole and undivided. It is the heart that will know when the Lord passes, the heart that will unfold the "mysterious struc-

13 Matthew 15: 10-11

14 "Do not be afraid" are the angel's words to Mary at Luke 1:30; "what, me worry?" was the motto of the *Mad Magazine* (1952-2018) mascot Alfred E. Neuman.

15 *The Rivers North of the Future*, p. 59

ture" of what presents itself. We possess, according to Illich, inner as well as outer senses, and the heart is where these inner perceptions register and assemble. It is in this sense that the Bible speaks of the heart – as the place where good or evil are "stored," as what leaps and rejoices, or grows dull and callous, as what can be hardened or suddenly opened – "I will remove from you your heart of stone," God tells the prophet Ezekiel, "and give you a heart of flesh."[16] It is in this sense also that Augustine in his *Confessions* says of Bishop Ambrose of Milan that his "eyes ran over the page, and his heart perceived the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent."[17]

About this spiritual or symbolic organ modern persons are highly ambivalent – when we are under the influence of bio-medicine and anatomical science, we think of the heart as a muscle or a mechanical pump, that can be readily repaired and even replaced, should it become defective, by someone else's heart. When we sing or read old books, meditate or pray, we experience the heart that melts and breaks, dreams or faints, cheats or is faithful – the heart whose chambers open inward into the realms of psyche and spirit. This ambivalence, which makes us all in some sense splitters, traces back in Illich's view to the very first stirrings of our contemporary world in the 11th and 12th centuries. It was then, Illich says, that science and spirit began to part company.

Reading, in the monastic tradition, had been an engrossing sensory experience – with the often-unseparated words of the cumbersome codex book sounded out and savored on the tongue. Reading monks were often compared to buzzing bees or grazing cattle. Then came a revolution in

16 Ezekiel 36:26

17 *Saint Augustine's Confessions*, Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1991, p. 92; Augustine found Ambrose's technique remarkable because, at the time, reading normally involved sounding out the words.

the lay-out of the manuscript book. Texts were divided into titled chapters; indexes, notes, quotation marks, paragraphs, and tables of contents were added; word separation, introduced earlier in some places, now became universal; and books, though still hand copied, became smaller and more portable. These changes, taken together, effected a revolution, though one that has been little noted and generally overshadowed by the invention, centuries later, of movable types.[18] It produced what Illich's calls "the visible text." In the *lectio divina* of the monastic orders, the word of God enfolded and contained its reader. The reader, in reading, was being read. The new optical technology, as Illich calls it, of the transformed page, allowed the mind of the reader to hover above the text. Laid open by its new apparatus of chapter and verse, index and inventory, it could become a scholarly tool, or what Illich calls "the mirror of [a] mind."

Illich ascribes many changes to this scribal revolution, among them the emergence of a new sense of self modelled on this new style of reading, but the one that concerns me here is the split between head and heart that occurred when "book-ish" reading replaced "monk-ish" reading. During the same years of the early 12th century that text was becoming visible and tractable, the first universities were founded – first in Bologna, then in Paris, then in many places. They took as their vocation the literary and scholarly inquiry that had been made possible by the transformed book, but they set aside the element of spiritual formation that had been the over-arching purpose of monastic reading. "The ascetical-mystical pursuit of prayer" and "the in-

18 Illich has told this story in his essay "A Plea for Research on Lay Literacy" (*In the Mirror of the Past*, Marion Boyars, 1992, pp. 159-181); in his book *In the Vineyard of the Text* (University of Chicago Press, 1993; and in an unpublished essay called "Text and University," here: https://www.pudel.samerski.de/pdf/TEXTANTL.pdf. A much more extended version of the ideas I am sketching here comprises Chapter 10 of my *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*, (Penn State Press, 2021)

tellectual-critical pursuit of truth," Illich says, "underwent "institutional segregation." "The acquisition of knowledge" was "pried' apart from "advancement in sensual discipline."

Illich believed that this separation of head and heart, critical thought and character, mind and body constituted "a cultural split…schism or rift that has been of deeper cultural consequence in the constitution of the West than any substantive, 'scientific' or doctrinal 'reformation' since." Characteristically, he condensed a many-centuries- long development into a clairvoyant reading of a founding moment, a reading which I'm sure will seem hyperbolic to some readers, but that was the way in which he studied history.

We live today at the extreme and failing end of the development that Illich traces to the beginning of the 12th century. By excluding the ethical character of our way of life, and the arts by which we actually live – what we call technology – from the university curriculum, we have ended up with a world governed by principles we barely understand and have no capacity to control. A pretense of control is still performed in our politics, but this consists mainly of what Illich called rain dances – his name for "rituals …that make those who participate in them blind to the discrepancy which exists between the purpose for which you perform the rain dance, and the actual social consequences the rain dance has."[19] One of Illich's responses to these circumstances was to revive the practice of *askesis* that he felt had been neglected in modernity – that long modernity whose arc he traced back to the 12th century. He used the Greek form of the word because he hoped it would be less likely to alarm contemporary readers than its English derivative, *asceticism,* which he thought had unfortunate and unwanted associations with heroic and

19 *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, p, 66; Illich developed his conception of ritual through his reading of anthropologist Max Gluckman. See his *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations,* Manchester University Press, 1962

self-regarding bodily disciplines, new and old. His argument was that all traditions, and not just the pre-modern Western one, had understood the need to locate their arts of living, including the practice of knowledge, within the context of what he called spiritual formation. (It would be possible, in this connection, to simply speak of *cultural* formation insofar as cultures were once concerned with the whole person and not just with what are now casually called "skill sets.") One learned to see and hear, taste and touch in the way thought appropriate in a given cultural setting. Illich's choice of the word *Askesis* was meant to evoke the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian variant of this universal understanding, but Illich was always intensely aware of the extent to which "our world is out of whack" with all "prior historical epochs."[20]

Illich had no thought of reviving antique or outmoded practices. He believed that the study of history could shed light on how we reached our present impasse, that a serious encounter with the past, free of the present's typical condescension, could unsettle contemporary certainties by revealing truly different ways of understanding the world, and that past practice could inform and guide the present; but he insisted that any contemporary practice of askesis would have to be "profoundly different from any[thing] previously known."[21] He offered no program, and didn't see it as his place to prescribe people's conduct in detail. But, in the communities in which he lived throughout his life, he saw it as his "task to explore the ways in which the life of the intellect, the disciplined and methodical pursuit of clear vision – one could say philosophy in the sense of loving truth – can be so lived that it becomes the occasion for the kindling of growth of *philia*" – again the Greek word

20 *Rivers North of the Future*, p. 60

21 I'm quoting from an unpublished outline Illich prepared in 1989 and submitted to David Ramage, then the President of the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, for a lecture series on "Askesis." The lectures were never given.

was chosen in preference to *love* or *friendship* in order to avoid the modern associations of those words. He wanted in other words to heal the split that he felt had defined and determined the destiny of the modern university.

At the beginning of his seminal *Tools for Conviviality* Illich complains that the word "austerity" has been "degraded and has acquired a bitter taste," whereas "for Aristotle or Aquinas it marked the foundation of friendship…Thomas… defines 'austerity' as a virtue which does not exclude all enjoyments, but only those which are distracting from or destructive of personal relatedness."[22] This statement reflects the same spirit that informs his later remarks on askesis, and on the need to guard our senses and avoid the *maiming* of our hearts. The "profoundly different" *askesis* that he urged his contemporaries to imagine, and of which he himself gave an example, was not meant to dampen enjoyment and celebration but to enhance them by protecting our inner and outer faculties from dullness, degradation and glut.

The point I want to enter here is that this will involve *re*-nunciation as much as *pro*-nunciation, going back as much as going forward, undoing as much as doing. "God is not found in the soul by adding anything," says Meister Eckhart says, "but by a process of subtraction." But part of the myth of progress that Wittgenstein says in*forms* our society is a violent resistance to subtraction.[23] We are ever ready to add, rather than subtract, and, in this, we are abetted by the language of problems and solutions: one finds out what's wrong, then fixes it by adding new layers of control and regulation, supervision and training, to "the system." Subtraction is not a solution. "A picture held us captive," as Wittgenstein, again, says, "and we could not get outside of it, for it lay in our language and

22 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, Harper and Row, 1973, p. xiii

23 "Progress is the *form* of our civilization rather than one of its features," Wittgenstein says in *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 7).

language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."[24] Going forward, breaking new ground, staying in tune with *the* (always advancing) *culture* are all reflexes. They lie "in our language." It is hard, therefore, to think of less rather than more, of the past rather than the future, of modesty and restraint rather than expansion and self-assertion.

Contemporary people now live, very largely, in the future – in plans, models, risk projections and the like. The decisive role played by modeling in the construction of the recent pandemic is a sufficient example. What would it mean to begin putting more emphasis on what is *present* here and now? It would mean finding a time that has not already been predicted and pre-determined – a time still in some sense free. It would mean refusing the steady succession of stupefying emergencies that, taken together, comprise the phases of a single never-ending emergency. It would mean rediscovering the past, not as a dead letter, but as a source of new beginnings and unexplored roads. And it would mean insisting that today, as always, it is necessary to think - even in the face of seemingly cogent claims that there is no time to think.

We cannot sustain civil discourse, civic peace, and free inquiry without a willingness to refuse what manifestly destroys these things. We cannot create the future without recovering the past. We cannot live in a din that drowns out thought or think with words designed to defeat thinking. We cannot keep "going forward" when what we need is already behind us. "Open any old book of ascetism," Illich says, and you will find the idea that the senses must be guarded against every kind of unreality in order for us to discover what Voegelin calls reality's "mysterious structure."[25] The Unknown Spectator found the boundary by exceeding it. Our whole civilization has now followed him into glut, disorientation and overload. Time, I would say, to turn back.

24 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1953/2001, p. 115

25 *The Rivers North of the Future,* pp. 108-109

Learning to Feel Stress

by Robert Kugelmann

I remember when I first used the word "stress" to name what I was feeling. Somehow, I caught on that what I was feeling had a particular name, and it was not anxiety, depression, worry, inadequacy, etc. It was stress. When I said to others that I was under stress, they expressed acknowledgement. It seemed that they too were under stress. It was obvious that we were experiencing the same thing. Stress has not always been obvious. There was a time when people did not use the word "stress" in the ways we use it. People faced all the trials and tribulations of their lives, all the agonies, all the sufferings, and the challenges of existence. But not "stress." Stress has a history.

To enter this strange word, I will ask of "stress" the questions Ludwig Wittgenstein raised about pain: "how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations?—of the word 'pain' for example."[1] With pain, the answer seems straightforward: "A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behavior."[2] How does a human being learn the meanings of "stress"?

Learning to use the word "stress" is more difficult than "pain" since the word is vague, at best. Any situation that demands change can be stressful. It stresses me out if my car won't start, if I get sick, if I lose my job, if my party loses the election, if I realize how big the cosmos is. Here is

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 244.

2 Wittgenstein, 244.

Robert Kugelmann, kugelman@udallas.edu
Kugelmann, R. Learning to Feel Stress.
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 128 - 152

an example. Someone tells me: I was bringing dinner to our daughter and her family, because she had just given birth. I was in the express lane of the freeway to avoid a backup in the regular lanes that was miles long. Then, the express lane stopped too. An accident ahead. The minutes crept by, and there was nothing I could do nothing to escape from the situation. Surrounded by cars and trucks, with no exit in sight. Getting later and later. Who knows how long it will take to clear up. Was anyone hurt or killed in the accident? It was stressful.

Appropriately for this example, "the appearance of stress in modern lives thus appears to be one of the consequences of living in the fast lane."[3] Living in the fast lane does not mean you are going anywhere! What is the fast lane and how does one live there? The literal meaning of "fast lane," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is: "A lane of a dual carriageway, motorway, highway, etc., typically positioned adjacent to the central reservation and intended for vehicles which are overtaking or travelling at faster speeds than the rest of the traffic." Metaphorically, it means "a lifestyle which is fast-paced, glamorous, hectic, or highly pressured, esp. one considered excessive or reckless."[4] The person who told me this story did admit to feeling sorry for the people stuck in the slow lanes, until the fast lane screeched to a stop.

What can this instance tell us about stress? About the experience of stress? First, the "world" of stress is uninviting. Sitting in a car stuck in traffic, there is nowhere to go. You can't abandon your car (except in extreme circumstances). There is nobody about, outside. Everyone around you is also stuck. People surround you, and all of whom are isolated, except for the fact that most of them have cell phones

3 Mark Jackson, *The Age of Stress: Science and the Search for Stability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

4 "Fast lane." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Accessed March 1, 2023: https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88252294?redirectedFrom=fast+lane#eid 22 February 2023.

and can make calls to explain a delay, etc. You are not where you want to be, and you would never voluntarily stop in the fast lane and have a picnic. You should be moving fast to your destination. Your legs are useless, in the sense that you can't leave your car and jog to where you want to be. There is a helplessness to the situation, and you feel it bodily: tense, angry, frustrated, anxious. This is no place to be.

How do I learn to say, in such a situation, that I am "stressed," "stressed out," or "under stress"? There are probably innumerable answers to this question. Here is one possibility, assuming I am ignorant of the word: I speak with someone who tells me that they are dealing with something unpleasant. Anything. The person says that this situation causes them "stress." I reply that I don't know what that word means. Let me assume that my interlocutor doesn't look at me with disdain, and she proceeds to tell me the basic story. I might hear something like this: It's like the fight or flight response, which works well for brief emergencies, but with stress, it endures too long. There are serious neurological, biochemical, and psychological consequences to this prolonged response. It can lead to illness, to depression, to PTSD even. Of course, instead of someone telling me, I may learn this account from a television program or even an online post. We learn to view ourselves through this explanation. And that is just the beginning, as this account leads us, perhaps, to try to do something to cope with stress. Perhaps we can even learn some stress management techniques. In the end, stress comes to be an important way we understand our very existence.

Stress "is both an experience and a discourse,"[5] a view supported by Mark Jackson who argued that stress "is both a condition and a metaphor."[6] These formulations indicate that

5 Robert Kugelmann, *Stress: The Nature and History of Engineered Grief* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 3.

6 Jackson, 2.

stress, real enough for all of us, is also a historically contingent phenomenon. What we experience was un-experienceable in times past (at least before sometime in the nineteenth century). There is nothing radical in such a contention. Someone from 1650 could not have experienced life in the fast lane and could have felt jetlag either. Just as jetlag is contingent upon long-distance air travel, so stress is contingent upon living in our industrialized and technologically complex society.

For Jackson, "we need to acknowledge the manner in which our obsessions with the relationship between stress and disease are the product of broader historical concerns about the preservation of personal and political, as well as physiological, stability."[7] By stability, Jackson meant a balance, on both the biological and the social level, in the face of rapid change, which destabilized existing structures:

> Scientific knowledge has unsettled assumptions about the stability and regularity of nature. … Uncertainty and instability are not confined to the material world, but also color perception, experience, and meaning. Configured by the principles and processes of individualism, secularization, and religious skepticism, even time, memory, and identity have become unreliable.[8]

Change is a constant, but Jackson notes that accelerating change, felt as stress, characterizes "our time," from the mid-nineteenth century, finding significant examples of the use of "stress" earlier than I had. However, the destabilizing that stress denotes is not simply negative. Stress "also embodied the exhilaration and achievement of perilous lives."[9] Instability is here to stay: "The modern delusion or

7 Jackson, 2.

8 Jackson, 265.

9 Jackson, 267.

myth may not be the conviction that we are unstable and stressed, but the belief that we can do anything about it."[10]

Stress Descriptive and Prescriptive

When we speak of stress, we typically do so in terms of describing circumstances of life, usually in negative terms. In more detailed discussion, the concerns are what stress causes (illness, negative emotions) and what causes stress. In terms of how we use "stress," we can look at how it orients us in a situation and how "stress" directs attention to particular beliefs and actions and not to others. Above all, stress has an ideological structure: "In the ideological background of stress lies the assumption of an essentially asocial atomistic individual."[11] Moreover, stress "naturalizes the social world."[12] Because it naturalizes the social, we can perceive stress as inevitable, one of the facts of life. At the same time, we can use stress to criticize the social. I can complain that the new work conditions—staff and budget cuts mean I have more work—are needlessly causing me to stress out. The critique, of course, is in terms of "stress." It is not a value-free critique. "Stress" orients us to the world in particular ways.

Stress is a particular discourse, a collection of "language games," that co-constitute or construct experience, action, our selves (especially the body), and the world, along set pathways. Let's say that stress is a script that is socially available to give form to experience. Let me give two examples. The first one occurs in a scientific study of stress and the immune system:

> One model states that *stress* occurs when *demands tax* or *exceed* available *resources* … Another conceptualizes

10 Jackson, 269.

11 Kugelmann, 21-22.

12 Kugelmann, 22. See Allan Young, "The Discourse on Stress and the Reproduction of Conventional Knowledge," *Social Science and Medicine*, 14 (1980): 133-46.

> stress as any resource *loss*, whether or not it is excessive … It is important for well-being to *minimize losses* in resources such as social integration that are strongly positively associated with human *health*. Therefore, when resources are *threatened*, it could be *adaptive* for organisms to direct *energy* away from the *immune system* and toward *protecting or restoring* their resources—that is, resolving the stress. Where might such energy go? One possibility is that *resource protection* involves *physical activity* (e.g., *fighting*), so the muscles would need additional glucose. However, in *modern life*, humans are more likely to use *mental and motivational mechanisms* such as *planning* and persistence to *cope* with *stressors*; such strategies also require glucose, but by *the brain rather than the muscles*.[13]

This passage is rich with the discursive terms and arguments that characterize the stress script. We can link the terms together as a string of associations: stress-demands-tax-exceed-resources-minimize-losses-health-threatened-adaptive-energy-immune system-protecting-restoring-fighting [fight or flight alluded to]-modern life-mental and motivational mechanisms-planning-cope-stressors-brain rather than muscles.

Stress entails "demands" that consume "resources;" indeed, stress may be a "resource loss." In this case, stress pulls energy from the immune system to other systems of the organism, such as the muscular system. But wait! That is largely an archaic response, since threats to our resources typically do not benefit from the "fight or flight" response so useful to our primitive ancestors. The uselessness of fight or flight in the face of stress is the representation of the "archaic body." Our bodies are archaic, designed to face physical violence. However, in the world of stress, direct conflicts

13 Suzanne C. Segerstrom, "Stress, Energy, and Immunity: An Ecological View." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16 no. 6 (2007): 327-28; italics added.

are rare. We divert energy from the immune system to mobilize "mental and motivational mechanisms" for purposes of "coping." Use of the mind means use of glucose in the brain. Here is yet another directive of stress: it especially affects "brain workers," a truism since the nineteenth century. In Jackson's terms, here is an example of the response to stress in terms of stability. In other terms, "stress occurs when a situation evokes a response of energy production for the purposes of maintaining an individual's integrity."[14]

Here is another account, drawn from a self-help website, *Psychology Today*:

> *Stress* generally refers to two things: the psychological perception of *pressure*, on the one hand, and the body's response to it, on the other, which involves *multiple systems, from metabolism to muscles* to memory.
>
> Some stress is necessary for all *living systems*; it is the means by which they encounter and respond to the *challenges* and *uncertainties* of existence. The perception of danger sets off an *automatic response system, known as the fight-or-flight response*, that, activated through *hormonal* signals, prepares an animal to meet a threat or to flee from it. A stressful event—whether it's the sudden appearance of a snake on the path or the fear of losing your job when the boss yells—triggers a cascade of hormones, including *adrenaline and cortisol*, that surge through the body.
>
> These hormones increase heartbeat and the circulation of blood to support quick action, mobilize fat and sugar for immediate energy, focus attention to track the danger, *prepare muscles for movement*, and more.

14 Kugelmann, 23

> But this lifesaving response was meant to solve *short-term*, life-threatening problems, not *extended difficulties such as daily traffic jams* or marital problems—a few of the many challenges that can hijack the stress response today.
>
> Many people today feel they perpetually struggle with stress and anxiety. Society's obsession with *productivity*, the steady stream of digital *information* we consume, increasingly sedentary lifestyles, and *feelings of overwhelm* may contribute to the stress that so many are feeling. …
>
> *Plan* and organize your time, reflect on your values and strengths, and practice *relaxation* techniques such as deep breathing. Additionally, reframe negative thoughts about a situation to neutral or *positive thoughts*.[15]

In this passage, the associations are as follows: stress-living systems-challenges-uncertainties-fight-or-flight-hormonal-adrenaline and cortisol-prepare muscles for movement-extended difficulties-daily traffic jams-productivity-information-feelings of overwhelm-plan-relaxation-positive thoughts. There is overlap in the two chains of associations, although in the second, there is more emphasis on "systems," "productivity," and "relaxation."

These associations are not in any particular order. They are like Legos; one can arrange them into any account of stress in various sequences. However, these terms and others like them tend to cluster in higher order discourse sequences: there is energy, trauma, control, loss, and grief. Here are some examples.

15 "Stress," *Psychology Today*, accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/stress. Italics added.

Energy

Stress, as ordinarily portrayed, is a bodily and mental response to demands. That response entails the consumption of energy. We feel energy in the efforts we make and in the fatigue that follows. It is important to note that we feel the sensations as energy consumption. That is, they are felt abstractions, felt as "energy," not as sensations used to be felt, each having its own *quale*. Consumption of energy, demands placed on our "systems," and fatigue lead to the ever-present risk of disease, especially chronic diseases, which are the ones most associated with stress. Disease is a breakdown, a threat to atomistic individuality, an exceeding of adaptive measures.

As important as "energy" is for the world of stress, even more important are "patterns of energy—that is, information."[16] Stress provides us with information, which we feel in terms of fatigue and other symptoms of instability. This aspect of stress discourse ties us into "risk management" whereby we analyze our situation in terms of the various demands that place our lives and health at risk.[17] We understand risks in terms of probability. And within the stress-structure, one way to cope is to seek out information. Information gives us know-how. In one sense, information is not knowledge, since information does not belong to experience that would entail self-understanding or contemplation. Information comes in bite-size chunks, which may lead to better coping with stress.

Trauma

Since the nineteenth century, stress and trauma have coincided. At first, it was "shock" that caused stress and disease. Then there was "railway spine" and "shell shock," and most of

16 Kugelmann, 25.

17 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity, trans. M. Ritter (London: Sage, 1992).*

all neurasthenia, which paired together stress (or its predecessors) and trauma. As conventionally understood, trauma is an event that transgresses the structures of our experiences and lives. A trauma is thus meaningless. Traumatic events are stressful, as the demands of the event disrupt our homeostatic systems. I suggest that the ubiquitous presence of trauma, and the ways that traumas of the past shape our lives today, our depressions and anxieties, occur because, under stress, we cannot subsist, in the way that Illich used the term, borrowed from a Scholastic conception of the human being.[18] To subsist is to be independent and autonomous in dependence.

As Levinas described it: "living from … delineates independence itself, the independence of enjoyment and of its happiness, which is the original pattern of all independence."[19] Without explicitly invoking "stress," Levinas differentiated it from what he called "enjoyment": "The contents from which life lives are not always indispensable to it for the maintenance of life, as means or as the fuel …necessary for the 'functioning' of existence. … Nourishment, as the means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment."[20] Enjoyment is the appropriation of what is other, a making of ourselves. Under stress, we do not joyfully make ourselves, but instead we strive for stability,[21] we seek to balance our various systems, biological (such as the immune system and the nervous system), the psychological (coping in its various forms), and the social (support groups). This balancing act takes place within the mandates of the economy.

18 Ivan Illich, "Subsistence," in *Powers that Make Us Human: The Foundations of Medical Ethics*, ed. Kenneth Vaux (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

19 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 110.

20 Levinas, 111.

21 Jackson, 11-4.

In our technological society, we are all in "intensive care," all on "life-support." How would I survive if not for the economic and technological systems that support our living (at least those of us who have the wherewithal to be so dependent on them). "One's living is not sustained from within, but … from without."[22] Events tend to traumatize us because we have become ungrounded from the symbolic structures of culture, so that we have fewer ways of comprehending what is happening. The stress-discourse is one framework we can use, but that plays into trauma because of its abstract form.

Control

Taking control of one's life is a mandate built into stress discourse. It contrasts with "being a victim," also prominent in stressful situations. While "control" of one's life may be largely an illusion, the pursuit of control gives us the sense of coping well and making progress against the demands and loads we face.

Three metaphors recur in the stress discourse when it comes to control: "engineering, administration, and the military" metaphors.[23] Stress entails an engineering approach to living: How much can I handle? Am I at the breaking point? What kinds of supports do I need? In the nineteenth century, the already existing word, "stress" acquired a precise engineering definition, and later, that engineering sense informed biological and psychological conceptions of stress. We enter into an engineering mentality when we are concerned with "strength, resilience, … hardiness, [and] flexibility."[24] Breaking points beyond flexibility belong here, and we tend to be aware that we all have our limits of coping and meeting demands and loads.

Military metaphors abound, particularly in the work

22 Kugelmann, 27.

23 Kugelmann, 28.

24 Kugelmann, 29.

of Hans Selye, the physiologist who investigated stress in the laboratory and who helped to popularize stress. He described a "General Adaptation Syndrome" "in terms of attack, defense, coexistence, resistance, exhaustion, defeat."[25] When we "cope" with stress, we often find ourselves in combat: "The earliest usage of *cope* meant 'to strike; to come to blows, encounter, join battle, … meet in the shock of battle or tournament."[26] That literal usage is obsolete, but to "cope *with*," meaning "to contend with, face, encounter (dangers, difficulties, etc.). Often implying "successful encounter" is current, even if this definition is narrower than other uses of "cope."[27]

Here is an example: In "Stressing About Stress" we learn about "combating stressors in a stressful time." The information piece continues: "Whatever the type of stress one experiences, recognizing, acknowledging, and ultimately combating it is crucial in order to maintain one's mental health and in some cases even physical well-being. Here are some practical things we can do to fight, or at least relieve stress." Stress "is a huge factor that threatens our mental well-being.[28] Some tips for combatting stress are addressed. In these military depictions of stress, we face a hostile world that threatens to cause havoc.

Administrative metaphors "proliferate in scientific literature" (Kugelmann, 1992, p. 29). The depiction of stress in terms of instrumental reason and efficiency make stress a manageable problem. Stevan E. Hobfoll (1989) developed a "conservation of resources" theory of stress. With stress, there is "the threat of a net loss of resources" or "a lack of resource gain following the

25 Kugelmann, 30.

26 "Cope," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/41131?rskey=XgawuS&result=6&isAdvanced=false#eid

27 "Cope."

28 "Stressing about Stress," *The Real Yellow Pages: Norman \ Moore area* (Therealyellowpages.com, 2022), n.p.

investment of resources," etc.[29] These administrative or managerial metaphors imply that instrumental rationality is the way to counter stress. We can see how much of this managerial approach occurs in the quotation from Segerstrom, cited earlier.

These three types of metaphors—engineering, military, and managerial—conspire together to present stress as a danger to an existing order of things. The discourse of stress entices an instrumental approach to difficulties in living. It objectifies experience, and the subject retreats from the world to gain mastery over threats to resources.

Loss

The loss of a job, of a relationship, of good health are common stresses. A sense of loss pervades the world of stress. Beyond the everyday losses that we encounter, however, is a real sense that the "modern world" in which we live is incompatible with the kind of being that we are. Often, this incompatibility appears in evolutionary terms: the changes in living in the modern world have outstripped our ability to adapt to them. This meaning of loss comes through the endocrinological accounts of stress. Walter B. Cannon's "fight or flight" reflex plays a leading role in this account. Here is an account from a National Institute of Health web site. The plot of this description is that we are not living in conditions in which we are at home:

> A *threat* to your life or safety triggers a *primal physical response* from the body, leaving you breathless, heart pounding, and mind racing. From deep within your brain, a chemical signal speeds *stress hormones* through the bloodstream, *priming your body to be alert and ready to escape danger*. Concentration becomes more focused, reaction time faster, and strength and agility increase.

29 Stevan E. Hobfoll, "*Conservation of Resources. A New Attempt at Conceptualizing Stress*," *American Psychologist, 44, no. 3, (1989): 516.*

> When the stressful situation ends, hormonal signals switch off the stress response and *the body returns to normal.*
> But in our *modern society*, stress doesn't always let up. Many of us now harbor anxiety and worry about daily events and relationships. Stress hormones continue to wash through the system in high levels, never leaving the blood and tissues. And so, *the stress response that once gave ancient people the speed and endurance to escape life-threatening dangers runs constantly in many modern people and never shuts down*.[30]

We come to suffer especially chronic diseases because we are living in an "unnatural" world. In other words, our bodies are archaic, ill-designed for our rapidly-changing technological society. This, then, is "stress."

Our Archaic Bodies

Because we cannot escape from our primitive organism, we need to manage this archaic body in order to prevent our incompatibility with modernity to lead us to disease and death. To deal with stress requires a disciplining of the flesh: diet, exercise—exercise machines are wonderful symbols of how we harness ourselves to high-tech systems to combat and cope with stress—learning relaxation and mindfulness in order counter the anxiety of modernity, and finally, subscribing to stress management.

The Exile

The incompatibility of our bodies and modern living is one trope in the discourse of stress, repeated endlessly. It is largely an evolutionary perspective: change happens faster

30 "Stress System Malfunction Could Lead to Serious, Life Threatening Disease", *Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*, accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.nichd.nih.gov/newsroom/releases/stress.

than our bodily systems can adapt. There is a second account of stressfulness of contemporary life: in the modern world, the myths and traditions that made life meaningful no longer speak to us, even in the midst of terrible events—earthquakes, war, epidemics, and other "acts of God," as we say. Anton Antonovsky, a sociologist, has captured what is going on: We have lost a "sense of coherence" in our lives: a sense of coherence "is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected."[31] "Hardships become stressful only when they lack meaningful context."[32] Although Antonovsky did not think that the modern world has lost a sense of coherence, except in "the extremes of totalitarian regimes or societies of 'normless libertarianism,'"[33] the motif of the exile asserts that a sense of coherence is eroding. As an example of our being exiles in this modern world—again, an assertion that somehow we do not "fit" into this new world and so experience "stress"—comes from a landmark book in the stress literature, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*:

> In times past, belief in the protective presence of a powerful God (or group of gods) allowed man to feel that he was being singled out and protected as a unique personage. Trust and pride in his particular group of fellow men, living and dead, gave him a feeling of emotional unity with them. These forces of religion and … patriotism, supported by myth and ritual, have been

31 Anton Antonovsky, *Health, Stress and Coping (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1979), 125.*

32 Kugelmann, 38.

33 Antonovsky, 38.

> waning relentlessly even as the forces making for automaton-man have been waxing.[34]

Exiles from the shelters of religion and patriotism can become Type A individuals, objectifying others, making enormous efforts to be "productive," and this behavior seems all too often to lead to heart disease in this narrative. Moreover, "it is not simply the loss of tradition and community that produces stress; it is their replacement with relationships without known … norms and rules."[35] As Joshua Meyrowitz wrote, we have lost a sense of place in modernity.[36] Some of this loss is liberating. Compared to earlier times, women no longer "know their place," and the same is true of ethnic minorities. "Their place" was under the heel of oppression. At the same time, loss of a sense of place means that we do not know where we are. That is stress. Certainties decay. Stress "originates in the ambivalence between the isolation and loneliness of the loss of tradition and the heady liberation that views myth as a set of barriers to be replaced by a 'dazzling array of choices.'"[37]

We now live in a "post-truth" society, defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."[38] Ours is a time where fake news — "news that conveys or incorporates false, fabricated, or deliberately misleading information, or that is characterized as or accused of doing so"— abounds,

34 Meyer Friedman and Ray H. Rosenman, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1974), 196.

35 Kugelmann, 39.

36 Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).*

37 Kugelmann, 40.

38 "Post-truth," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/58609044?redirectedFrom=post-truth#eid.

the presumably solid ground of fact dissolving.[39] The blurring of lines between the real and the fictional, truth and lie, is the latest incarnation of being-in-stress. We are exiles, increasingly cut off from the mode of existence of people even recently deceased. "Fact" has dissolved into "construct."

Marshall Berman borrowed the title to his book, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*,[40] from Marx, in a passage that sheds light on our current situation:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.[41]

We too have melted into air; we have become angelic and demonic. All has melted into air, into airy words, words with no anchors in the real, because there is nothing but air.

Grief

Stress has a family resemblance to grief: "Stress is grief in which losses are not mourned but adapted to."[42] I had pro-

39 "Fake," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67776?redirectedFrom=fake+news#eid1264306660.

40 Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

41 Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, in M. Eastman, ed., *Capital, The Communist Manifesto and Other Writings of Karl Marx*, (New York: Carlton House, 1923), 324.

42 Kugelmann, 41.

posed in 1992 that stress is grief that has no resolution of the conflicting desires that grief entails: "grief … is the expression of a profound conflict between contradictory impulses—to consolidate all that is still valuable and important in the past, and preserve it from loss; and at the same time, to re-establish a meaningful pattern of relationships, in which the loss is accepted."[43] This conception of grief dovetails with stress in significant ways: stress occurs in our modern world with losses that demand adaptation, with a sense that we live in a brave new world where nothing is any longer familiar. Instead of mourning our losses—for which there is no time and no rituals—we adapt to them if we can. We manage stress, cope with it, employ instrumental reason to control it. What we cannot do is mourn the losses. Stress names a type of not-mourning, a not-mourning that takes the desires to hold on to the past and to let it go and experiences the desires as "energy." Stress is a kind of transformer, forestalling grief and promoting productivity and consumption. Stress is "engineered grief."[44]

In 1992, I saw all stresses as engineered grief. I now question that conclusion, because it assumes that there is something stable that runs through all our stress. Given the plasticity of the term, its vagueness, I would revise my earlier conclusion and say that one type of stress is engineered grief. There are other kinds. Stress is engineered fatigue. Stress is engineered rage. Stress is engineered anxiety. The "engineering" is the rational (instrumental rationality) transformation of any of these passions into "energy" as the drive behind our adaptation to a stressful world. Any passion taken as a resource is "stress." Just as we view the world as a "gas station" (to use an expression from Heidegger), so when we are stressed, we take our very being as a resource: "The world now

43 Peter Marris, *Loss and Change* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 31-2.

44 Kugelmann, 44.

appears as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, attacks that nothing is believed able any longer to resist. Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry."[45] Our nature, too.

Where Did Stress Come From?

Stress belongs to our world, our "modern world," with its accelerating changes fueled by technological innovations and social and political upheavals. This is the place of "stress." Before our modern world took shape, there was no stress. This is because stress is itself a technology. And technologies belong to specific times and places. I take my cue here from Bruno Latour (2000), who argued that an Egyptian pharaoh could not have had tuberculosis, because nineteenth century medicine constituted that disease. Latour argues:

> For technology, objects *never* escape the conditions of their productions. An isolated machine gun in the remote past is a pragmatic absurdity—and so, by the way, is an isolated machine gun in the present without the know-how, bullets, oil, repairmen, and logistics necessary to activate it. Another advantage of a technological artifact is that we have no difficulty in imagining that it rusts away and disappears. Thus, it always remains tied to a circumscribed and well-defined spatiotemporal envelope.[46]

Stress and its discourse arose with our technological society. There is no one source of this discourse, and many social institutions contributed to it: medicine, especially military medicine, endocrinology, psychiatry, psychology, engineering,

45 Martin Heidegger, "Memorial Address, in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. J. M. Anderson & E. H. Freund. (New York, Harper & Row, 1966), 44.

46 Bruno Latour, "On the Partial Existence of Existing *and* Nonexisting Objects," in *Biographies of Scientific Objects*, ed. Lorraine Daston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 250.

management, mass media, and education (Psych 101 courses, for instance). Stress is a product of efforts to understand and to address what is happening. Latour's *askesis* directs attention to the relationships between a technology and its historical-social environment. So also, with stress. The plagues of the fourteenth century did not cause stress. Our pandemics do.

Stress as a Recognized Topic

When did the discourse on stress begin? World War II seems to have been when it came into its own, although Jackson found abundant evidence of stress as a cause of chronic diseases going back into the nineteenth century, and the year 1983 as the moment when "stress emerged as the archetypal disease of civilization."[47] Probably the most significant moment in the constellation of stress as a disease and as a symptom of disease was the incorporation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-III*) in 1980. I am not going to survey the history of the emergence of stress but will concentrate on the changes that this "modern certainty", to use Illich's term, has shaped how we see our lives. Stress arose in endocrinological laboratories and in psychiatric treatment of soldiers with psychological wounds of war. It now permeates existence in a specific way: it describes and prescribes what it means to be groundless: "to have life sustained by machines, to survive by means of a complex network or system that can be operated only through one's own participation."[48] Hudson Hoagland (1899-1982), a physiologist, studied the responses of military personnel to modern warfare, wrote significantly about stress. Hoagland wrote:

47 Jackson, 3.

48 Kugelmann, 61.

> In recent years, with the development of aviation, man has desired to be free in an environment for which his evolutionary history could not possibly have fitted him. In high-speed airplanes he is assailed by new and formidable stresses. … He must adjust to severe and unaccustomed accelerations and rapid changes of atmospheric pressures which, together with the peculiar emotional stresses of modern aviation, may be exacting in the extreme.[49]

Hoagland captured the difficulties we have in adapting to unprecedented circumstances. Taking aviation as a metaphor for our situation, we find here that "stress accompanies a desire to be no longer tied to the limitations of corporeal existence … This desire for transcendence is not new, insofar as aspirations for immortality … are perennial. What is novel is its achievement in physical terms."[50] This is the structure of our world.

Stress and Luxury

All that is solid has melted into air. "Stress" belongs to a family of concepts that includes, of all things, luxury. Before the eighteenth century, luxury was a vice. Adam and Eve's great fault was not pride; it was luxury. Luxury meant "not knowing one's limits, materially or socially."[51] Luxury signified unfettered growth; we still speak of plants, those that grow beyond their normal limits as luxuriant. Luxury, until the eighteenth century, weakened "both morals and the body, making its victims susceptible to illness."[52] The accusation of the luxurious behavior of others could be a charge made by the upper classes about the lower classes in repressive ways,

49 Hudson Hoagland, "Adventures in biological engineering," *Science,* 100, (1944) 63-64.

50 Kugelmann, 61.

51 Kugelmann, 158.

52 Kugelmann, 158.

to be sure. Luxury belonged to a discourse about limits and the dangers of surpassing them. However, during the eighteenth century, luxury became seen as good: the desire to surpass one's limits became the aim of the new commercial class, which pushed back against the aristocracy. Bernard de Mandeville's 1721 *The Fable of the Bees* was an early defense of luxury. Mandeville wrote: "if the wants of Man are innumerable, then what ought to supply them has no bounds."[53] In the early nineteenth century, Jeremy Bentham praised luxury:

> Luxury is not only an inseparable accompaniment to opulence, but increases in proportion to it. As men rise one above another in the scale of opulence, the upper one may, without excess, give into expenses which those below cannot give into without prodigality. It is therefore no more desirable that luxury should be repressed, than it is that opulence should be repressed—that is, that security should be diminished. If it were desirable that luxury should be repressed, it could be done no otherwise than either by depriving the more opulent classes of a part of their property in this view, or coercing them in the use of it. It would be less unreasonable to restrain prodigality wherever it is to be found than to restrain the highest imaginable pitch of luxury on the part of those whose expense does not exceed their income.[54]

The pursuit of luxury had, by then, become almost a mandate. Around the same time, however, in addition to luxury being something to encourage, came warnings that the pursuit of luxury caused disease. The political thinker and correspondent with Darwin, William Rathbone Greg (1853), wrote: "the

53 Quoted in John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 115.

54 Jeremy Bentham, "Manual of Political Economy," H. Bowring, ed., *The works of Jeremy Bentham* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1843), 38.

excessive toil and the severe struggle for life which we all unite to deprecate and deplore is, in truth, a self-imposed necessity," because few really valuable "objects of earthly existence require wealth for their attainment."[55] Here we see a reversal of values in the past three hundred years. In Greg's warning, "luxury" is on its way to becoming "stress." Whereas "luxury" had, at first, warned about the ethical dangers of striving but became a good when this striving was good, "stress" warns about not coping and adjusting to this striving, which is the lifeblood of our contemporary, groundless existence.

Stress and Disembodiment

To what end does experiencing ourselves as under stress lead? It may lead to better health, to managing our anxieties in a fast-paced demanding world. It may do us some good. However, stress has its shadows, and we see them imaged in popular culture in the figures of the vampire and the zombie. There are all sorts of variations on these two figures, but it is essential to them that they are already dead when they begin causing havoc to the non-vampires and non-zombies in the population. While vampires tend to the glamorous, zombies are decidedly ugly. Despite their differences, vampires and zombies have one essential thing in common however: they never get stressed. They have solved the problem of stress by being, in comparison to the rest of us, relatively disembodied. Vampires and zombies have managed their stress, they are stress-free because they are un-dead.[56]

Stress management entices us to perceive our bodies and our selves in particular ways. "Management" in this

55 William Rathbone Greg, "England as It Is," in *Essays on Political and Social Sciences*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1853), 326-27.

56 Robert Kugelmann, "Stress management: A twentieth century western disease?" in Lola Romanucci-Ross, Daniel E. Moerman, and Laurence R. Tancredi, eds., *Anthropology of Medicine: From Culture to Method*, 3rd ed. (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 1977).

context means that stress has objective qualities that allow us to handle it. I learn to manage it. "It" is not "me," and so I am somewhere other than where stress is. Management puts distance between me and stress. Felt stress is in "the body," which is at a distance from me. To manage stress, we "work on our bodies,"[57] as well as on our relationships and our responsibilities. One way of working on our bodies to reduce stress is to learn about the neurological, endocrinological, and psychological aspects of stress. This is when we learn, above all, that we have archaic bodies ill-suited for the modern world. I can begin to feel and talk about bodily changes in these terms, in a way analogous to how a child learns the meaning of "pain." I sense my bodily feelings in stress-related terms, which mediate between me and stress. The technology of stress, with its endocrinological, neurological, and psychological explanations, mediates between me and my body, me and my world. Stress becomes real.

One particular way of learning to experience the body under stress is to learn to relax. Since the 1970s, relaxation has been a counter to stress[58] (Benson, 1975; Jackson, 2013, p. 233). In learning to relax, we get "in touch with" your body. The Mayo Clinic has this advice about relaxation: "As you learn relaxation techniques, you can become more aware of muscle tension and other physical sensations of stress. Once you know what the stress response feels like, you can make a conscious effort to practice a relaxation technique the moment you start to feel stress symptoms. This can prevent stress from spiraling out of control and decreasing your quality of life."[59] Anoth-

57 Kugelmann, 1992, 168.

58 Herbert Benson, *The Relaxation Response* (New York: Avon, 1975). See Jackson, 233.

59 Mayo Clinic Staff, "Healthy lifestyle: Stress management," *Mayo Clinic*, Accessed February 2, 2023, https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/relaxation-technique/art-20045368.

er source lists 18 ways to relax, including deep breathing, which "reduces cortisol levels. Increased cortisol is linked with stress, and reducing your cortisol can help you relax."[60]

At the basis of these ways of describing our experiences of the body is the anatomized body: "This body is … an alienated body, since it is no-body … It derives originally from the study of corpses … Through emblems omnipresent today, … we come easily to accept the corpse as the real body. Stress management is a form of training which further instills in consciousness a corpse-like body image"[61] (Kugelmann, 1992, p. 170; see van den Berg, 1961; Romanyshyn, 1989). Stress management teaches us that we are living corpses. That is how we can thrive in a stressful world, by managing our stresses at the cost of becoming un-dead. We thrive in a stressful world as disembodied beings. Now we are at home in the fast lane. In these ways we answer Wittgenstein's question as applied to stress: "how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations?"[62]

60 S. Barkley, S, "18 ways to relax your mind, body, and soul," *PsychCentral*, accessed February 5, 2023, https://psychcentral.com/blog/healthiest-ways-to-relax-your-mind-body-and-soul

61 Kugelmann, 1992, 170; see J. H. van den Berg, *The Changing Nature of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962); Robert Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989).

62 Wittgenstein, 244.

Nemesis Plagues Covid-19 Management

by Silja Samerski

Introduction

"The medical establishment has become a major threat to health" was the first line of Ivan Illich's widely translated book of 1976 titled *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis— the expropriation of health.*[1] For the 1995 republication of this book, Illich added a preface. The old title made explicit that placing limits to medicine is the only way to regain health. The new preface argued that the pursuit of health itself had become a major threat to embodied self-perception. Only those familiar with this book can see that all the salient features of the covid years — above all, disembodied self-management —are malign consequences of too much medicine.

In *Nemesis,* Illich persuasively showed that the attempt to produce health with more and more technique would be counterproductive. He argued that "beyond a critical level of intensity, institutional health care—no matter if it takes the form of cure, prevention, or environmental engineering—is equivalent to systematic health denial."[2] The book and this argument was discussed around the world, in many instances sparking vehement controversy.[3] The times have changed though. The damages to health caused by an expanding, hi-tech, and profit-oriented health system are now routinely

1 It was also published in English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Italian, Croatian, Japanese, and Hindi.

2 Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis. The Expropriation of Health.* Boyars, London 1976, p. 7

3 For the history of reception and impact see among others. S. O'Mahony, Medical Nemesis 40 years on: the enduring legacy of Ivan Illich, *J R Coll Physicians Edinb* 2016; 46: 134–9.

Silja Samerski, silja@samerski.de
Samerski, S. Nemesis plagues Covid-19 management.
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 153 - 164

discussed on TV talk shows. Though some of his arguments have become received wisdom, *Nemesis* is by no measure an outdated book. On the contrary, a careful reading of the book and its preface reveals it far exceeds the commonplace medical criticism. Illich not only indicts the medical establishment for prescribing harm, but also for promoting the destructive "pursuit of health." As he wrote in the epilogue of the German reprint of *Nemesis*, "…I wanted to make the medically mobilized pursuit of health a paradigm for a mega-technology which makes it possible to abandon the *conditio humana*."[4]

Illich's critique of the pursuit of health is crucial to understanding the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The book *Nemesis* makes its attentive readers aware that all the seemingly distinctive features of managing the Covid-19 illness — the naming of a disease as a crisis, the war against illness and death by all available means, and the curtailment of basic rights and liberties, the medicalization of everyday life through tests and medical classifications, and the supremacy of experts–— had already been predicted by him as malign and necessary outgrowths of an unlimited medical enterprise.

The pursuit of health authorizes the unlimited rule of technology

Nemesis is a fundamental critique of unlimited technological progress. The illusion that technology can save people from the dark sides of life such as infirmity, death, and hardship leads directly to new forms of dependence and submission: "When overconfidence in industrial production and servicing determines the social order in such a manner that industry gains a virtual monopoly on the employment of new applications, then the enslavement of humans by machines will not be abolished but pressed in new, globally

4 Illich 1995, S. 206, translation by author

homogeneous forms. The tool changes from a servant to a despot."[5]

The biggest "despot" during the COVID-19 pandemic was, without doubt, the vaccination. Faith in a technological solution was so great that vaccination was seen as the only way out of the pandemic – even before it was possible to know anything about the effect of the vaccines. The approval studies of manufacturers did not establish whether the vaccines prevented transmission or even infection. Nevertheless, the politicians still promised "we will vaccinate Germany back to freedom"[6] and declared to give all people a vaccination as the most important goal. Even though in Israel, regarded as the "vaccination world champion", so-called "breakthrough infections" increased in Autumn 2021, and it was already clear that vaccinations would not lead to the desired herd immunity[7], politicians and health officials in Germany stubbornly proclaimed a "pandemic of the unvaccinated."[8] Unvaccinated people became scapegoats for the fact that the supposed panacea, the vaccination, did not live up to people's expectations. Though numerous studies prove that the immunity of recovered people is at least as good as the immunity of vaccinated people,[9] even today, German health politicians devalue recovery from illness as a way to immunity while they exalt the vaccine.

5 Illich "Do not lead us into diagnosis, but deliver us of the pursuit of health", Opening Lecture at the *Bologna Symposium on Health and Illness as Social Metaphors*, 1998.

6 Quote Jens Spahn, see among others https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article233333163/Jens-Spahn-zu-Corona-Wir-impfen-Deutschland-zurueck-in-die-Freiheit.html

7 Goldberg, Y., et al. (2021). "Waning Immunity after the BNT162b2 Vaccine in Israel." *New England Journal of Medicine* 385(24): e85.

8 For example Jens Spahn, see among others https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/chronik-coronavirus.html

9 See Diani, S.; Leonardi, E.; Cavezzi, A. et al., E. SARS-CoV-2 - The Role of Natural Immunity: A Narrative Review. *J. Clin. Med.* 11 (2022), 6272, sowie Nordström, Peter, Ballin, Marcel, Nordström, Anna, Risk of SARS-CoV-2 reinfection and COVID-19 hospitalization in individuals with natural and hybrid immunity: a retrospective, total population cohort study in Sweden. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 22 (2022): P 781-790

Other covid-19 management tools are no less despotic. The state of emergency is still not over in Germany. Almost half a century ago, Illich noted that "the ritualization of crisis, a general trait of a morbid society, […] provides [the medical functionary] with a license that usually only the military can claim. Under the stress of crisis, the professional who is believed to be in command can easily presume immunity from the ordinary rules of justice and decency".[10] This is precisely what happened in the "war against corona"[11] which empowered those who believed themselves to be fighting a battle — mainly virologists, medical authorities, and health politicians — to rule over the daily lives of citizens. Basic rights were suspended and the government supported by a board of scientists determined by decree who was allowed to leave the house when and for what, who could meet who, and what immune status somebody needed to be able to go Christmas shopping or assist his or her dying grandmother. There was ineffectual if noisy resistance. Only since spring 2022, has a very cautious public debate gained momentum, in which questions have been posed about the relative benefits of pandemic management measures. And it turns out that there is almost no evidence for the idea that lockdowns, compulsory masks, and vaccination certificates would have stopped the virus from spreading.[12] On

10 Illich 1976, p. 34

11 The "war against corona" was not only proclaimed by the French president Emmanuel Macron (see "Sind im Krieg", RND, 16.03.2020, https://www.rnd.de/politik/sind-im-krieg-frankreich-verhangt-ausgangssperre-im-kampf-gegen-coronavirus-OAGQAFXXE7IPEUI224KHWPVEA4.html), but for example also by the German economist Hans-Werner Sinn (see "Wir befinden uns im Krieg gegen Corona", Augsburger Allgemeine, 15.03.2020, https://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/wirtschaft/Konjunktur-Top-Oekonom-Hans-Werner-Sinn-Wir-befinden-uns-im-Krieg-gegen-Corona-id57055756.html)-

12 Evaluationskommission, *Evaluation der Rechtsgrundlagen und Maßnahmen der Pandemiepolitik*. Bericht des Sachverständigenausschusses nach §5 Abs. 9 IFSG. Online: https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/fileadmin/Dateien/3_Downloads/S/Sachverstaendigenausschuss/220630_Evaluationsbericht_IFSG_NEU.pdf

the other hand, such measures have harmed society severely, including the health of its members. As Illich pointed out many years ago, "the orientation of any institution towards 'crisis' justifies enormous ordinary ineffectiveness."[13] What Illich concluded about the medical "terminal ceremonies"[14] back then, can also be said about the recently concluded COVID-19 measures: they testify that "the religious use of medical technique has come to prevail over its technical purpose."[15]

Numerous institutions, hospitals, children and youth facilities, and state schools continue to demand G-verifications, often without any legal basis.[16] Institution-related compulsory vaccination which is unable to serve the purpose it was intended for – the protection of vulnerable people against infection – will not be revoked. The obligation to wear a mask in trains was tightened, the legal basis for compulsory masks indoors was created (an infringement of fundamental rights), and new vaccination campaigns were launched. According to health secretary Lauterbach, the idea of such ineffectual current infection protection laws is to "avoid having many deaths, severe cases, and long-COVID"[17] and "avoiding the overload of infrastructure and hospitals."[18] These goals are so vague that the measures cannot be evaluated. It is hard not to think that pandemic management reversed the relation between aims and means.

13 Illich 1976, 34

14 Ibid., 33

15 Ibid., 34

16 Social work students report at my seminars that they are being asked for a vaccination certificate for their internships at private institutions as well as state schools.

17 Karl Lauterbach, see https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/chronik-coronavirus.html (8th September 2022).

18 Karl Lauterbach, https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/chronik-coronavirus.html (24th August 2022).

The "pursuit of health" leads to an increasingly monitored and controlled society

Medical Nemesis is a book about the growing unfreedom in a society which replaces independent actions and individual abilities with industrial goods and professional services. People are not only discouraged from being born and dying at home, but also actively prevented from assisting one another, recovering from illness and keeping healthy without medical services. Illich foresaw that "society becomes a hospital"[19] once the medical establishment establishes a monopoly on health. He did not mean that everybody would then disappear behind the walls of hospitals, but rather that the boundaries of medical institutions would dissolve and spread into society. From then, people would have to adapt their lives to the plans and diagnoses of health experts.

The COVID-19 measures have made this medicalization of everyday life worse and enforced continuous control. Just as inside a hospital, people in society are divided into different medical categories and allocated to different "treatment courses." For example, in many German schools in autumn 2021, vaccinated pupils could go directly into the classroom while unvaccinated pupils had to be tested first – often in a separate room. Sometimes school trips and events took place with the 2G rule so that pupils without a corresponding G-certificate were excluded. In a society turned clinic, educational institutions are enrolled in the cause of social control. Similarly, this classification and certification took on unprecedented dimensions in the general population. Numerous new COVID-19 categorizations were created whereby medical bureaucrats subdivided people into those who – although completely healthy – could be locked up home for two weeks, who could only go shopping for groceries, who were not allowed to go back to their home country, who are

19 Illich 1998, Lead us not into diagnosis…

considered a health risk due to their unconventional opinions and who, despite being vaccinated, are considered "unvaccinated after a certain date and are therefore not allowed to go to work." If citizens and pupils were institutionally discriminated by biological features instead of such "medical" categories there would have been an outcry. Since such discriminatory measures occur in the name of "health", barely anyone takes offence.

When Illich wrote *Nemesis*, doctors were still regarded as "half-gods in white." They have mostly lost this dominant position in the health system nowadays. According to Illich, 25 years after *Nemesis*, biocratic health management is taken over by a "bio-team" in which the doctor only has a symbolic function: "his white coat serves the myth, that health could be industrially improved here."[20] What he did not foresee though, was the digitalization of the health system in which the "bio-team" is replaced by apps and artificial intelligence. While medical assessment and attestation were previously needed for a medical category, the categorization and discrimination are automatic nowadays: by means of digital tools, the classification of people, who are allowed or not allowed to do something, can be made with a few clicks – doctors are not needed for that anymore. COVID-19 vaccination cards for example have created a digital infrastructure which can be used as passports in one's own country. Depending on the registered vaccination or test, people receive different rights and obligations at the touch of a button. A software update is sufficient in Germany to distinguish between people who must wear a mask and those who do not have to wear one. For the recently vaccinated, the G certificate is green, for the others blue, announced the health secretary in autumn 2022.[21]

20 Ivan Illich, 1998, Lead us not into diagnosis..."Gesundheit Krankheit - Metaphern des Lebens und der Gesellschaft". https://www.pudel.samerski.de/pdf/Illich98dt_Und_bol.pdf

21 Dominik Rzepka, Grüne Impfzertifikate. So soll die Corona-App ab Herbst aussehen.

The medically justified classification and monitoring of people become especially pervasive and comprehensive, "once a society organizes for a preventive disease-hunt."[22] When Illich wrote this line, he did not have the "war against COVID-19" in mind; he spoke instead of hunting the illness itself, meaning medicine that aims at preventing illnesses before they occur. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the "preventive disease-hunt" became a daily routine and made permanent monitoring and mistrust commonplace. Citizens were prompted to control infection risks in everyday life. All people, including the completely healthy, were seen as a risk, as a potential health hazard. What "sleeper cells" are to the fight against terrorism, the asymptomatically ill are to the war against the coronavirus: nondescript and therefore especially dangerous risk persons. Mistrust was generalized; citizens were not seen as bearers of rights, but primarily as carriers of infection risks. For example, only when they could prove that they had recently been tested, recovered, or vaccinated, were they allowed to go into a hotel or on board a train. Within a short period of time, a digital infrastructure was created which compelled people to prove again and again that they were not "superspreaders." The constitutional presumption of innocence was reversed – a typical and far-reaching perversion of law in the prevention regime. In a constitutional state, every human is considered innocent until the opposite is proved. A society which is committed to prevention, guilt is presumed and its members must furnish proof of their normality or innocence.[23]

ZDF heute, 12.08.2022, https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/corona-warn-app-lauterbach-impfzertifikat-100.html

22 Illich 1976, P. 33

23 Bröckling, U., Vorbeugen ist besser … Zur Soziologie der Prävention. Behemot. *A Journal on Civilisation* 2008(1): 38-48

The "pursuit of health" is hostile towards death

COVID-19 policies have not only declared war on a virus but also on another enemy: death. Politics, media, and medicine insinuate that every person who died with or from COVID-19, had died an unnecessary and avoidable death – even at an old age of 80 or 90. Until the 20th century, a doctor withdrew when he saw that a patient was on his deathbed. The doctor let a priest take over – he could not do anything for his patient anymore. Nowadays medicine tries to fight death. As Illich observed, "…medicine is now concerned less with the empirical art of healing the curable and much more with the rational approach to the salvation of mankind from attack by illness, from the shackles of impairment, and even from the necessity of death."[24] This aim of maximizing life years by means of technology causes people to be less able to adopt the *conditio humana*. People die every day because of inhuman living conditions which could be changed politically, be it at the EU borders, on the autobahn, or because of social inequality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, "Life" in a biological sense became sacrosanct and sheer survival the main objective. Dying was thus deprived of any dignity: people on their deathbeds with the diagnosis "COVID-19" often could not say farewell to their beloved ones and died isolated and deprived of all social and cultural support in hi-tech surroundings. Similar indignities attended many in retirement and nursing homes who locked in their rooms and without visits from their relatives, first died a social death before their biological termination.

The "pursuit of health" destroys embodied self-perception

Besides the "hostility towards death", Illich also points out another related dimension of fictionalization which de-

24 Ibid., 96

stroys the traditional art of living and suffering: the "disembodiment", the obliteration of the "sensually accessible body of the past". "Every encounter with the health system", as Illich wrote, leads to their "epistemic transformation."[25] Modern medicine, according to Illich, imputes to people an iatrogenic body, which they cannot feel and experience anymore, but can only manage with diagnoses and test results. Numerous technological and medical rituals prevent us from using our "common sense", and prompt us instead to see ourselves in the categories of hi-tech medicine. We do not perceive ourselves as physical and mortal beings but, for example, as flexible immune systems that need resilience support and immune boosters to adapt to their crisis-ridden environment. This "turmoil in the experience of the world and death" as Illich puts it, leads to "world estranged disembodiment and programmed helplessness."[26]

Such fictionalizing disembodiment took on absurd dimensions during the COVID-19 pandemic. For months media, pamphlets, and posters visualized the invisible enemy, with whom society was at war, as an oversized spiky ball; old and young were exposed to incomprehensible technical lingo like "mRNA", "antibody level", "R value", "incidence", "antigens", "T cell immunity", "vulnerable groups" etc., to justify their confinement. The instructed citizens neither learned something about themselves nor about science. Instead, they learnt not to trust their senses but to see themselves as controllable biological systems whose immunity needs to be checked and maintained by medical staff. During the COVID-19 pandemic, children already learned to see themselves through the eyes of doctors, epidemiologists, and virologists. Even if they felt completely healthy, they were inculcated to believe that an invisible danger could be inside them. Only the red test strip

25 Illich 1995, 207.

26 Ivan Illich, Verlust von Welt und Fleisch, in: Duden/Samerski: *Zum Tod des Kulturkritikers Ivan Illich*. Freitag, 13.12.2002

and finally the PCR results from the laboratory reveal the hidden truth about their own bodies. An entire generation has been drilled to glorify technology and to feel in obedience to test results; they have been prepared to become the helpless and dependent medicine consumers of tomorrow.

Conclusion: A way out of the "scheduled, technological hell"?

Whoever asks *cui bono* when analyzing the COVID-19 measures rapidly spots capitalist profiteers like Pfizer and the Gates Foundation as influential instigators or even manipulators. That the pharmaceutical industry bribes licensing authorities and politicians and is not afraid of using Mafia-like methods has been frequently reported.[27] The murky approval process of vaccines, the massive marketing, and insufficient official control of COVID vaccines is unquestionably a scandal.[28] Studies also show how the philanthropic capitalism of the Gates Foundation determines global health and development policies and thus stabilizes existing power and exploitation relationships.[29] But it would be misleading to make Pfizer and Bill Gates liable for compulsory vaccinations and COVID-19 panic, "just as irrelevant as blaming the Mafia for the use of illicit drugs."[30] The technocratic measures of the last three years are a

27 Among others Gøtzsche 2014; Maryanne Demasi, From FDA to MHRA: are drug regulators for hire? *BMJ* 377 (2022): o1538, doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o1538; Jureidini, Jon und McHenry, Leemon B., The illusion of evidence-based medicine. *BMJ* 2022;376:o702 http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o702

28 Among others Fraiman J, Erviti J, Jones M, et al., Serious adverse events of special interest following mRNA COVID-19 vaccination in randomized trials in adults. *Vaccine* 40 (2022):-805. doi: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2022.08.036 pmid: 36055877; Aseem Malhotra, Curing the pandemic of misinformation on COVID-19 mRNA vaccines through real evidence-based medicine – Part 2. *J. insul. Resist.*2022, 5 (1) a 72. https://doi.org/10.4102/jir.v56i1.72

29 Meisterhans, N., Die neoliberale Mär vom wohltätigen Unternehmertum: der Philanthrokapitalismus als Herrendiskurs. *Psychologie und Gesellschaftskritik*, 39(2/3), 2015, 75-99. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-56678-215

30 Illich 1976, 24

manifestation of the irrationality of a society which is ruled by the faith in technological feasibility. The result is a "compulsive survival in a scheduled, technological hell."[31]

In the 1970s, Illich foresaw the unbearable overplanning and engineering of everyday life, which increased drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Never before in history have the lives of people outside of prisons been regulated as rigorously as during the COVID-19 pandemic"[32] The abolition of liberties and the increased programming of environment and behavior are not unprecedented measures of an alleged "COVID dictatorship", but the unavoidable results of the endeavor to technically control health and manage life. Even without a state of emergency, a "scheduled, technological hell" is initiated by ongoing digitalization – a massive increase of technocratic management and dictatorship —in the name of health.[33] The COVID-19 pandemic has only made socially acceptable what was already commonplace in the health sector.

A comprehensive and fair-minded reappraisal of the management of the SARS-Cov2 virus would provide the opportunity to question the self-evidence of the "war against COVID-19" and promises of a digitalized preventive medicine. Ivan Illich's *Nemesis* is a rich source of profound answers to questions of its own time and ours. Illich criticizes not only those who appear to produce and sell health, but also those who believe to be able to consume, control, and optimize it. If we are to have hope in not losing our abilities to care for each other, to be healthy, to give birth, to recover, to heal, to assist and to die in the teeth of a "mega-technology" designed to destroy those abilities, there is no way around carefully reading *Medical Nemesis*.

31 Illich 1995, 200

32 Heribert Prantl, *Not und Gebot. Grundrechte in Quarantäne*, Munich 2021, 8.

33 See also Silja Samerski, *Psychotherapiepatienten als Datensätze. Auswirkungen der Digitalisierung auf die therapeutische Beziehung*, Frankfurt 2022.

Ivan Illich and the Phenomenology of the Incarnation*

by Giovanna Morelli

The theme of incarnation (and its opposite) first appears in Illich in the second half of the 1970s when he discusses the body as a terrain conquered by medical rationality. The theme grows in importance during the 1980s, in his study of vernacular man as the carnal subject of history and his analysis of the disincarnating power of contemporary paradigms. It continues in the 1990s, with the anthropology of sensory deprivation in the cybernetic age, culminating in the metaphysics of the Incarnation. In his last conversations with David Cayley, Illich points out the continuity between his interest in the history of the body and his way of understanding the Gospel.[1] The theme of incarnation – which gives Illichian thought its specificity– is therefore studied on sociological, historiographical, and philosophical levels to then be transfigured and completed on the level of faith[2].

The counter-productivity of the *technological society* can now be re-interpreted in the light of this theme; a theme

* For reasons of space, only a few stages of Illich's reflection on the theme of incarnation will be considered here. For a more exhaustive analysis, I refer to my text from which this essay is taken: "Ivan Illich and the phenomenology of incarnation", in In cammino sullo spartiacque. Scritti su Ivan Illich, edited by A. Arrigoni, E. Morandi, R. Prandini, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2017, pp.33-69. Neto Leão and Samar Farage translated this text. Giovanna Morelli offered helpful corrections and suggestions to improve the final text.

1 I. Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley,* House of Anansi Press, Toronto 2005; trad.it. *I fiumi a nord del futuro*, *testamento raccolto da David Cayley*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2009, p. 203.

2 "Voice donc un contemporain dont les yeux du cœur voient dans le mystère de l'Incarnation la source de son inspiration et de ses actes », see J. Robert, V. Borremans, "Préface" in *Oeuvres complètes*, Fayard, Paris 2004, p. 11.

Giovanna Morelli, mgiovanna.morelli@libero.it
Morelli, G. Ivan Illich and the Phenomenology of the Incarnation. Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 165 - 183

which is now emphasized by the advent of new informational devices as well as by the disembodied epistemology of man as a system, according to the eco-systemic imaginary. In his analysis of the present, Illich reaches the mental horizon of the cyber-future by exploring the past. He presents us the past – as a sort of beneficial shock from a direct epistemological contrast – thanks to which the alienating enchantment of the new system-cybernetic order becomes evident. The past does not provide Illich a model to emulate but the occasion to encounter carnality (fleshiness) which is a fundamental dimension of the human, a *conditio sine qua non* of personal ontology and its freedom. This carnality is understood as a two-sided experience: a rooting of the self in the concreteness of the body and, conversely, an existential elaboration of one's own living and dying in the flesh.

If it seems that Illich conceptually referred to carnality in a negative way by his analyses of what it is not,[3] it is also true that he calls us to experience it in terms of a virtuous circle between body and self. This convergence of incarnation and individuation constitutes one of the most precious hints left to us by Illich.

The lost body: from the art of suffering to iatrogenic expropriation

Early in his research, Illich claimed a redemption of the body from its material disablement by the radical monopoly of out-of-proportion techno-practices. In *Tools for Conviviality*,[4] he speaks of the body as the prime mover, the *causa efficiens* of appropriate technologies; in *Energy and*

3 See . B. Duden, "The quest for past somatics" in L. Hoinacki , C. Mitcham, *The challenges of Ivan Illich: a collective reflection* , SUNY Press, Albany NY 2002, chap. 19; quoted by D. Cérézuelle, "La technique et la chair" in *Jacques Ellul, penseur sans frontières,* edited by P. Troude-Chastenet, L'Esprit du Temps, Le Bouscat Cedex 2005.

4 I. Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, Harper & Roy, New York 1973.

Equity[5], the body is spoken of as *causa efficiens* of personal transit as opposed to transportation. The consideration of the body returned to its flesh is articulated in *Medical Nemesis*,[6] anchored in the history of bodily pain and by the "evolution of bodily perception in the technological age."[7] The history of pain attests to the status of the body beyond itself, until the fullness of human *pathos* starting from the great question that men, unlike animals, ask themselves about the existence of pain and of the flesh, which is the matrix of pain. Devoid of "congenital evolutionary mechanisms that guide him to a balance," man suffers his own body and at the same time exists creatively in it. The *ethos* of each tradition configures the sense of the body.

Pain is thus absorbed within the context of *Leistung*:[8] the work, performance, or human art of confronting being born, living, and dying in the body.

> Each culture shapes its own particular *Gestalt* of health and its own particular type of attitudes towards pain, disease, impairment and death, each of which is a different species of that human interpretation traditionally called the art of suffering.[9]

Illich underlines both "the cultural uniqueness of health" and

5 I. Illich, *Energy and Equity* (1973) in I. Illich, *Toward a History of Needs*, Pantheon Books, New York 1978.

6 According to B. Duden : "A cette époque (1976) the " matière " que la médecine a transformée en l'espace de quelques générations , c'est-à-dire le corps , ne pointait pas encore à l'horizon de sa critique des institutions," in *Illich, seconde période , Esprit,* 362, 2010, pp. 136-156. However, in the light of many passages in the text, I think it can be argued that in *Medical Nemesis* Illich sets the stage for his body history.

7 I. Illich, *Limits to Medicine. Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, Marion Boyars, London 1975; trad.it. *Nemesi medica. L'espropriazione della salute,* B. Mondadori, Milano 2004, p. 153.

8 Ivi, note 8 p. 149.

9 Ivi, p.141.

the profound consubstantiality of culture with bodily experience. In this sense "health and culture are in part the same thing" and *ethos* is a virtue of the soul and a training of the body. This double face of *ethos* analyzed in *Medical Nemesis* introduces us to the nucleus of that experience which Illich will refer to with the triad of terms "flesh, carnality-fleshiness, incarnation-enfleshment." Beyond a narrow use of the term — as brute satisfaction, as the dominance of the "appetitive ego" over other human proclivities — carnality is expressed in the range of existential arts by which we realize ourselves in the realm of physicality. For Illich, *ethos* and *aisthesis*, ethics and aesthetics (as realm of sensible experience) are one and the same in the enfleshed subject. Illich claims that this configuration is completely different from what will triumph in Descartes. "The body and the soul became separate" when Descartes constructed:

> …an image of the body in terms of geometry, mechanics or clockwork [...] The body became an apparatus owned and directed by the soul, but from an almost infinite distance. The lived bodily experience, which the French refer to as '*la chair*' and the Germans with *der Leib*, was reduced to a mechanism that the soul could inspect.[10]

Here, Illich heralds the fundamental dichotomy in his history of the body: *Corps/chair, Körper/Leib, body/flesh.*[11] On the one hand the lived experience, and on the other hand, the abstract notion of the body, objectified in the very perception of the sufferer. With regard to the modern medicalized body/pain, Illich speaks of a *schizo-aisthesis*: the technical management of pain alienates the subject from the existential elaboration of his own sensual reality

10 Ivi, p. 164.

11 I. Illich, *Gender*, Pantheon Books, New York 1982; trad.it. *Il genere e il sesso*, A. Mondadori, Milano 1984, p.144.

and his earthly condition. Further stages of disincarnation follow the medicalized body: the "iatrogenic body" which coincides with a sanitized image of the body regardless of its state of disease, and the "cybergenic body". The medical profession becomes an accessory to the dictates of Public Health by erecting a medical and therefore a biopolitical edifice around the body.[12]

Techniques in combination with language, ritual, and myth were once applied to the human art of suffering pain. In the ancient European tradition, writes Illich, a single approach was unthinkable. "The medicalisation of pain, on the other hand, has caused the hypertrophy of only one of these methods – technical intervention – and accentuated the decline of the others."[13]-Reflecting on the "cultural iatrogenesis" caused by a medicalized body, Illich began to trace the deep meaning of technical nemesis. Accordingly, Illich would come to speak of a "fetishism of life"[14] that puts "life" before the person (a fetishism that includes the macabre iatrogenic survival, by law, on already comatose organisms). The *bios*, in its original existential sense – *curriculum vitae*[15] – is dethroned by its purely biological successor, "life".

As Illich notes in *Medical Nemesis*, the "progressive flattening of virtuous personal performance," goes hand in hand with the loss of pleasure. "The consumer of pain-killers" is distanced from an existential dialogue with his own body and does not know how to accommodate himself to

12 I. Illich, *La perte des sens*, Fayard, Paris, 2004; trad.it. *La perdita dei sensi*, LEF, Florence 2009, p.256.

13 I. Illich, *Nemesi medica,* cit., p. 160.

14 See I. Illich, "Demistificare la bioetica: un appello" (1987); "La vita umana come nuovo feticcio" (1989) *In the Mirror of the Past*, Marion Boyars, London 1992; trad.it. *Nello specchio del passato,* Red editions, Como 1992.

15 I. Illich, D. Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation,* House of Anansi Press, Toronto 1992; trad.it. *Conversazioni con Ivan Illich,* Elèuthera, Milano 1994, p. 211; I. Illich, *La perdita dei sensi*, cit., pp. 108,110.

pain or pleasure. The "increased threshold of physiologically-based experience" induces a demand for ever stronger stimulants. In this sense, by fleeing the specter of masochism we lose every authentic hedonism, precisely while we ideologically claim our right to enjoyment. Pushed to the limit, the manipulation of pain and the body could produce a new species of horror, "the experience of artificial numbness."[16] This "anaesthetization" of a body that would like to be technically amortal, threatens, according to Illich, our own "experience of the ego", which is so deeply rooted in the whole range of sensual experiences to which we owe "the sense of being alive." This incarnated subjectivity cannot be defined in terms of pure physicality or in the equally abstract and objectifiable terms of psycho-physical unity.[17] It presents itself as the most intimate, personally dense datum that can only be appropriated by oneself. Consciousness of oneself and of the world emerges from the carnal depths; its otherness with respect to the body is given only through the body. I think thanks to and through my flesh, my thought is nourished by everything that comes to me from the experience of flesh, space and time, the forms, and the written-spoken body of language without which there is no thought.

Here we meet the paradoxical ambiguity of the incarnation: our most evident limit – the Gnostic "night of the flesh," the antiquated "prison of the flesh" that is so disliked by the cyborg utopia – is at the same time the foundation of our person and its liberty, which for Illich will finally be crowned by the revelation of transcendence in the carnal dimension of individuality.

The incarnation of the vernacular gender

16 I. Illich, *Nemesi medica*, cit., p. 167.

17 I. Illich, *I fiumi a nord del futuro*, cit., p. 207.

The analysis of the incarnation and its opposite — technical excarnation— proceeds in Illich's subsequent writings through the perspective of the "vernacular". Vernacular means, for Illich, the millennial daily grammar of lived experiences, the art of existing that has marked the history of man in the variety of his styles, through the communal ways of life beginning with the style of dwelling: "a house made by people and not for people, it is a place generated by bodies."[18]

The vernacular makes its debut in some talks at the end of the 1970s[19] where Illich asserts that he has undertaken "the study of history as a privileged way" to isolate the *novum* of *homo oeconomicus*. *Shadow Work*[20] follows, whose themes are deepened and refined in *Gender.* If traditional community cultures are sociologically interpreted by the vernacular, this latter, in turn, is interpreted in this text by gender. Thus, gender attaches itself to the other characteristics of the vernacular — the conviviality of instruments, the organic nature of learning, the dominance of commons, the self-definition of occupations, and the exceptional nature of wage labor. For Illich, above all, gender allowed him to pose "the epistemological question of modern European ways of perception."[21]

Like pain and pleasure, the masculine-feminine duality is one of the cornerstones of bodily experience. This duality is dealt with differently, Illich notes, in the domains of gender and sex, which indicate a duality "of a *very* different nature."[22] Gendered identity shapes the totality of experience, imprinting thought, language, perceptions, gestures, places, times,

18 I. Illich, *Il genere e il sesso,* cit., p. 158.

19 Among these "Le tre dimensioni della scelta pubblica" (1979) e "La sfera educativa" (1979) both in *In the mirror of the past,* cit.

20 I. Illich, *Shadow Work,* Marion Boyars, London-New York 1981.

21 I. Illich, D. Cayley, *Conversazioni con Ivan Illich*, cit., pp. 123, 133. Cf. also the introduction to a German re-edition of *Gender,* CH Beck, München 1995.

22 I. Illich, *Il genere e il sesso*, cit., p.37.

tools, and tasks. Gender, inscribed in the practice – virtuous and corporal, ethical and aesthetic – of the incarnate man is, for Illich, a kind of art variously practiced in all vernacular cultures. "Gender transforms the penis into innumerable types of phalluses; sex merely *produces* the only international, menacing, and enviable "penis".[23] For Illich, the universality of gender is open and compatible with the concrete anthropological variety the incarnation assumes in pre-modern cultures. Conversely, sex channels, through the abstract genital polarization of two homogeneous opposites, the same "neutral force which, at the end of the century, Freud would have given the name of *libido*."[24] For Illich as for Foucault – to whom Illich refers – the notion of sex is a recent historical phenomenon which represents, according to Foucault, one of the main "political technologies of life" typical of modernity.[25]

The objectified neutrality of sexual categories in contrast to the internalized and stratified experience of gender is, for Illich, the most striking and symptomatic form of the neutrality of modern categories. The purely sexual body is to the body of gender what the iatrogenic body is to *Leistung,* the existential experience of pain. As in *Medical Nemesis*, what Illich stigmatizes is the *disembedding* of techno-scientific categories from the entirety of incarnate man*,* which is dramatically put into crisis by the Christian history of the West.

By illustrating the relationship between the two sides of gender, Illich introduces the concept of *asymmetrical* or *dissymmetrical complementarity.*[26] In the realm of gender, be-

23 Ivi, note 7 p. 31.

24 Ivi, note 7 p.30.

25 M. Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, Gallimard, Paris 1976.

26 After having used the term asymmetrical, Illich will opt for dissymmetrical arguing that dissymmetrical places the accent more precisely on a misaligned but intimately complementary, proportionate correspondence. I. Illich, *The rivers north of the future,* cit., pp. 195-196. For the concept of complementarity Illich refers to R. Hertz, *Il genere e il sesso,* cit., note 57 p. 102.

ing-woman is, with respect to being-man, a completely different phenomenon, located beyond the thresholds of one's own incarnation, and yet tuned, congruent, something "mutually constitutive", in accord with a "reciprocal generation." The alterity of gender charges the relationship with attraction and fear. "A relationship that can never really be grasped, or which escapes as soon as it is grasped."[27] The masculine universe refers to the feminine (and vice versa) using the poetic ambiguity of metaphor that relates two alterities without squashing either into the same semantic grid. The contact between genders uses rituals that exorcise the fear of difference, without dimming the amazement. They "orchestrate the dance of life, marking bodies, intertwining genres and then separating them again."[28]

The mutual perception between the two genders exemplifies a more general sensitivity to ontological variety/complementarity, to the pantheon of otherness in which is expressed the traditional cosmic intelligence of being. In fact, for Illich the concept of "asymmetric complementarity" will present itself as a constitutive trait of the very idea of *kosmos* – from *kosmein*, to pair, "composing two parts or two faces"[29]– and of the *ethos* inspired by this cosmogonic intelligence. *Kosmos* here indicates the co-existence of the different in a single order which embodies the differentiation of being without disintegrating into *chaos.* Up and down, right and left, macro and micro, "two armies, two shores, the sky and the earth, the eye and the colors, the ear and the harmonic sound. The composition then results in a battle, a river, the universe, the *visibilia* and music."[30] One is referring here to

27 I. Illich, *I fiumi a nord del futuro,* cit., p. 195.

28 I. Illich, *Il genere e il sesso,* cit., p. 167.

29 I. Illich, "Passato scopico ed etica dello sguardo" (1995), in *La perdita dei sensi,* cit., p. 279.

30 Ibid.

the sense of "ontological proportionality," the loss of which marks the progressive advance of the quantitative monotony of modernity.[31] This feeling of proportionality (and the relative sense of what is "good") concerns not only the intuition of the limit, as a proportionate relationship between shape and size, but also the intuition of *tonos*, the tension or tightness of a micro/ macro *cosmos* in the asymmetrical proportionality or complementarity of its components.

Conspiratio: The ontology of the Incarnation

When asked about *Gender* by his friend Cayley, Illich not only confirmed the relevance of the vernacular gender, but also acknowledged its irreversible decline.[32] Illich agrees with Cayley that "gendered domains are arbitrary limitations on the human freedom to be what we would like to be"; they are also compatible with patriarchal oppression in a closed society.[33]

Analogous shadows will be detected, in the reflections presented in *The Rivers North of the Future*, for the overall realm of *ethnos* and its self-referentiality. The pre-Christian *kosmos* is punctuated by a dance of "collective you": the we/ you of gender, of *gens,* of caste, of ethnic group. This naturalized, deeply embodied *ethos* can suppress the subject, orienting and sometimes limiting the path of individuation. Already in a forward-looking passage in *Medical Nemesis*, Illich, following Ellul, distinguishes two forms of heteronomy, traditional and technical. "The roles available to an individual have always been of two types: those standardized by cultur-

31 Ibid. In the same collection, see also La saggezza di Leopold Kohr" (1994); also I. Illich, *La perdita dei sensi,* cit., pp.194-196.

32 Gender will continue to represent a problematic juncture for Illich, and the text dedicated to it, which has generated so much controversy and misunderstanding, remains the only one which he has never managed to draw up a presentation that clarifies the reasons why he wrote it. I. Illich, D. Cayley, *Conversazioni con Ivan Illich*, cit. p. 128.

33 Ivi, pp.130-131; 136-137.

al tradition and those arising from bureaucratic organization [...] rationally created."[34]

It will be the New Testament, in Illichian exegesis of the late 1980s and 1990s (the decade consecrated to "philia") what will introduce us to an unprecedented, flaming sense of personal uniqueness. This virtue/personal freedom founded by the Gospel, breaks with the ancient configurations of the We. The relative sense of the I as singular of a We, is replaced by a new We as the plural of the I, the We celebrated by the Eucharistic assembly of the earliest Christians centuries. The new Christian subject and the Us that corresponds to it transcend the traditional connotations "of status, gender or origin." Christians, according to Illlich, found a community outside the one into which they were born, based on an unprecedented fraternity, a new *philia*.

Christian spirituality involves self-awareness of an unprecedented dimension of incarnated transcendence. It liberates the person from the absolute identification with their own ethnic, historical, and biographical borders and, at the same time, reconciles the person to them. Such a doubly rooted anthropology of freedom, which valorizes the individualized experience of the spirit in the flesh, is at once within and beyond social limits. With the advent of Christ, writes Illich, the tent of God, towards which an uprooted people are in perennial journey, is now implanted "on the earth in the flesh of his son", and, through Him in the enfleshed You of every other child of God. *Verbum caro factum est* The word was made flesh.[35] Illich specifies: "what is being spoken of is not the soma, the body as a whole, but its carnality [fleshiness]."[36] Fleshiness, a two-sided experience, a communion of body

34 I. Illich, *Nemesi medica,* cit., pp.130-131.

35 Jn 1:14.

36 I. Illich, *I fiumi a nord del futuro,* cit., p. 203.

and soul, returns to the heart of Christology, opening itself to the seeding of that spiritual principle which completes the anthropology of the Incarnation.

The *Conspiratio* of the early Christians —the liturgical kiss mentioned by Illich—expresses this ontological complicity between spirituality and the flesh, a "spiritual union" rooted in "somatic, bodily depth". It is in these terms that Illich reads the relation of the Samaritan to the Jew, in his preferred parable.

> Just as God became flesh and in the flesh relates to each of us, so are you capable of relating in the flesh, as one who says "ego", and when he says "ego", points to an experience that is entirely sensual, embodied and earthly [...] Take away this fleshy, bodily, carnal, dense, humoral experience of the self, and therefore of the Thou, and you will have a nice liberal fantasy, which is something horrible.[37]

Where there is *conspiratio*, ontological personal difference manifests itself in "the profound asymmetry between our faces." Each face is preserved "in its exquisite delicacy and impenetrability", beyond the automatisms of recognition and self- recognition. Illich here recalls Martin Buber's relational "double word" I-Thou. For Illich, the Thou is suspended in the abyss of its own carnal and spiritual uniqueness, and yet – in ambiguous asymmetry – complementary, proportional, substantially like the I. The face-to-face which constitutes the essence of the *kosmos* is brought back to its most radical, personal ground. The new Christian proportionality concerns the minimal spaces of the free, unprecedented I-Thou proportions where new cosmic relationships blossom, a new front of that creation which continues through the incarna-

37 Ivi, p. 205.

tion."[38]

Cybernetic disincarnation

We remember what was presented in *Medical Nemesis*: the weakening of the carnal subject which radically undermines personal ontology. In the new myths at the end of the millennium this trend seems to Illich to have gone beyond the threshold of sense.

> We are on the threshold of a still unnoticed transition […] the experts who gave us needs are now busily at work reconceptualize their gift to us, redefining humanity yet again. To survive, they say, we must see ourselves not as citizens, but as cyborgs [...], infinitesimally small units in a series of inclusive systems, ending no one knows where.[39]

> We now consider the human being as a system, that is, as an extraordinarily complex arrangement of feedback loops; and the fundamental characteristic of that system is to seek its own survival by maintaining an informational balance which keeps it viable.[40]

> A self-regulating self-constructed system that requires responsible management.[41]

38 I. Illich, *I fiumi a nord del futuro,* cit., p. 213.

39 I. Illich, La storia dei bisogni" (1988-1990), in *La perdita dei sensi*, cit., pp. 101-102.

40 I. Illich, *I fiumi a nord del futuro,* cit., p. 201.

41 I. Illich, "Twenty years after the first publication of *Nemesis Medical*", in *Nemesi medica*, cit., p. 299. An appendix consisting of the preamble of the afterword to the fourth German edition of 1995 and of the speech held in 1994 at the Congress of the *Quality Health Research Association* (also in I. Illich, *La perdita dei sensi,* cit., "Medical treatments for immune systems" (1994) pp. 241-252). Despite his pointed criticisms of the text, Illich will argue: "After a quarter of a century I continue to be satisfied with the substance and form of *Nemesi*. The book [...] brought medicine back to the field of

Before the "surreptitiously disembodying force of neologisms such as *coping*"[42]was brought into focus, this cybernetic model of man was part of Illich 's reflections. He was probably attracted by "autopoiesis" to the extent that he projected into it that idea of "constructive" freedom which he expressed as self-shaping – *Selbstgestaltung,* creative interaction with one's own limits, in contrast to a purely "negative" experience of freedom as freedom "from the limit."

From this point of view, *Medical Nemesis* stands as a boundary text between the old and new approach. These are the years in which Illich can still allow himself to speak of personal freedom in terms of "autopoiesis", the years of the influence exercised on him by Gregory Bateson.[43] Illich borrowed the term *coping* from Bateson who used it "to introduce systems theory into anthropology" and spoke of "health as *coping intensity*":

> [...] I believed that concepts such as feedback, program, autopoiesis or information, if used skillfully, could clarify matters. I thought I could equate suffering with the management of my own balance. I was wrong.[44]

This adherence to a certain systemic imaginary, which will be the last object of Illichian criticism, is already substantially surpassed by the depth of analysis and by the peculiar terminological choices. In relation to the idea of "Nemesis" Illich writes:

> Using the Greek term, I want to emphasize that the corresponding phenomenon does not fit within the explanato-

philosophy", ivi, p. 298.

42 Ivi, p. 299.

43 Ivi, p. 302.

44 Ibid.

> ry paradigm now offered by bureaucrats, therapists, and ideologues for the snowballing diseconomies and disutilities that, lacking all intuition, they have determined and that they tend to call 'the counterintuitive behavior of large systems.' By invoking myths and ancestral gods, I should make it clear that my framework for the analysis of the current breakdown of medicine is foreign to the industrially determined logic and ethos. I believe that the reversal of nemesis can come only from within man and not from yet another managed (heteronomous) source depending once again on presumptuous expertise and subsequent mystification.[45]

The autopoietic model will therefore later be disavowed as a rational-cybernetic simulacrum, the mental correlate of a bio-management that drains personal self-perception. Illich points out the counterproductivity of this new semantic field. Indeed, "perfectly legitimate" systemic concepts "lend themselves to a variety of reductionisms."[46] Systemic management – "the set of planning and control activities of a system and its resources"[47]– appears to Illich as a new, insidious, disembodied, and depersonalizing form of power, an extreme technocratic form of denial of freedom. Personal care turns into internalized self-management with an exclusive dependence on clinical parameters of good functioning. "The cybernetic optimum" leaves very little room for holistic personal self-determination. Illich will also speak of a "second level disembodiment" or "algorithmization" in relation to the *abstracta* of statistical entities, the risk profiles.[48]

In the guise of fascinating bio-systems, mechanistic

45 I. Illich, *Nemesi medica*, cit., pp. 42-43.

46 I. Illich, "Cure mediche per sistemi immunitari", cit., p. 246.

47 I. Illich, "La vita umana come nuovo feticcio", cit., p. 219.

48 I. Illich, , *I fiumi a nord del futuro*, cit., p. 221.

thought surpasses itself in the radical novelty of the "cybernetic dream" and its apparatuses.[49] These are the same mechanisms that make possible, according to Ellul, the advent of the Technological System, the integrated expropriation of all human practices. The apparatus dematerializes, turning itself into a prosthesis in man: in exchange for minimal material encumbrance, we have increasingly integrated extensive and invasive software. System rationality insinuates itself into the user producing an intimate, paradoxical delocalization -excarnation- of the mind. In this context, Illich does not fail to address the "miasma of communication" (as a chaotic flow of data that disables the art of reflection proper to *homo textualis* [50]), and the prevailing *iconomania* understood as a perversion of Christian *iconodulia*. Thanks to increasingly advanced techniques, the new representations are not images of the other but simulations, a pure virtual show[51], a phantasmatic breach that draws our being into a dimension of non-being. Again, a paradoxical excarnation of self and of the world, analogously to what happens with the loss of the "carnal gaze" due to the "exosomatic prostheses of the eye" which produce the "instrumental vision." The eye, dissociated from the solidarity with the other senses – *synaisthesis* –progresses in both the micro and macro dimensions, being shown the interior of the body as well as the whole planet from the outside.

Mysterium iniquitatis: Christ between *ethnos* and *mechanicus*

Illich's spiritual journey will mark his last step, rein-

49 I. Illich, "L'alfabetizzazione informatica e il sogno cibernetico" (1987), in *Nello specchio del passato*, cit., pp. 202-203.

50 I. Illich, In the Vineyard of the Text. *A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1993.

51 I. Illich, "Passato scopico e etica dello sguardo", cit., e "Sorvegliare il proprio sguardo nell'era dello 'show' " (1993) in *La perdita dei sensi*, cit.

serting the reading of history in the context of meta-history. Secular arguments appeared to Illich as no longer sufficient. "One could continue to indefinitely argue the systematic destructiveness of industrial-age service systems"[52] and the countless aberrations of the era, but, as Illich tells Ellul, the keystone lies elsewhere. "All these horrors derive their ontological status from the fact that they are exactly subversions of what you call "X" and what I [...] would call divine grace."[53]

In overcoming archaic dimensions and ethno-natural proportions, the Incarnation brings its own perversion to history: *mysterium iniquitatis*, "the mysterious evil that entered the world with the Incarnation."[54] Iniquity now takes on the features of a "mechanical" mystery, an ontological violation of the Incarnation achieved through the institutional and technocratic management of "philanthropy" that corrodes, from within, the communion of flesh and spirit and the relationships based on it. In this way, not so much the evangelical axiology as its ontology is betrayed, an ontology not sufficiently contemplated both in and outside the realm of faith.[55] In this sense we can speak of a triple Illichian anthropology, Christ as the watershed between *ethnos* and *mechanicus*.

Universalism embodied in the concrete and unique flesh of each of us is replaced by the abstract, impersonal, and homogenizing universalism of the machine. In this context we understand the double meaning of two fundamental terms of Illich's reflection – "neutrality" and "person." Regarding the new Christian *philia,* Illich emphasizes that *frater* or *adelphos*

52 I. Illich," L'impresa educativa attuale vista con gli occhi dell'emarginato" (1988), p. 59.

53 I. Illich,. "Omaggio di Ivan Illich a Jacques Ellul" (1993) , p. 151.

54 I. Illich, *I fiumi a nord del futuro*, cit., p.45.

55 The theme of *ensarkosis logou* in Illich, Ellul and Charbonneau, in relation to the critique of the technocratic society, and the divergent exegeses of the Incarnation in the Christian tradition are treated by D. Cérézuelle, "La technique et la chair", in *Jacques Ellul, penseur sans frontières,* cit. In this regard, the comparison with the Christology of D. Bonhoeffer is fundamental.

is a "neutral"[56]word; in this case, it is a question of a positive meaning of neutrality, the neutrality of an experience placed beyond the pre-judgments of the *ethnos* and strongly rooted in the freedom of personal virtue. The negative meaning of neutrality, the neutrality of institutional and techno-scientist categories with their carnal and existential annihilation, can settle in the space opened by this Christian novelty. The person as a person in Christ, in his uniqueness and density of spirit and flesh, will find himself facing his own *alter ego*, the phantasmatic and abstract (anti) person evoked and guaranteed in many of our politically correct discourses. The double meaning implies the relationship of the term to its own "double", the worst that can be generated in history as a perversion of the best (*Corruptio optimi pessima*). In the human adventure we encounter a further ambiguity: incarnation includes processes of objectification of the self (creation of the instrumental world, scientific domination, elaboration of works, texts, social structures …), but the same capacity to objectify, when detached from man's carnal and spiritual fullness, contains the seeds of dis-incarnation, of self-alienation. Again, the deadly and perverse kingdom of the Anti-Christ settles in the new inner space freed by Christ.

Illich nevertheless reminds us that the advent of the best opens history indefinitely: the best can always regenerate from the worst. A globalized and pervasive power that interactively inserts itself in the ontology of our flesh and person, returns us to get in touch with ourselves. Perhaps we are impotent with respect to macro-dynamics. We are nevertheless powerful with respect to what is still in our hands, which is precisely ourselves, the only source of freedom in history. After he gave up his hope of a large-scale radical reversal (Epimethean renaissance, convivial society), Illich's focused on the appropriate dis-connection from the system by small

56 I. Illich,"L'origine cristiana dei servizi" (1987), in *La perdita dei sensi*, cit. p. 25.

neo-vernacular resistance groups who were inspired to care for the person and return to the lived and felt body. At the end of the long *peregrinatio* in the ancient carnality of the world, Illichian hope will find its new formulation in *askesis*. "By *askesis*, today, I mean the deliberate escape from consumption when it replaces convivial action"[57], that is, action incarnated in the creative reciprocity of relationships and in the celebration of our common humanity. And thereby we can reclaim our perceptions, thoughts, desires, pleasures and needs, in the alliance of flesh and spirit against the mechanistic perversion of the person. Illich does not formulate here a depoliticization of action, but rather a radical politicization, under the banner of *philia*. The anarchy of Jesus infiltrates and sabotages management with the ontological liveliness of the I-Thou and of the friendships that can arise from it. We are dealing with free and therefore "vulnerable and fragile" roots capable of founding a unique atmosphere of incarnation (*conspiratio*) through the common and disciplined search for truth.

57 Ivi, "Cure mediche per sistemi immunitari", cit., p. 249.

Reading Ivan Illich on the Elemental Body

by Babette Babich

"Philosophy was deprived of the body
and the body was deprived of its cosmic belonging."

— Ivan Illich[1]

The body is flesh: incarnate, corporeal. To speak of the body and of incarnation, Ivan Illich (1926-2002), invokes different manifestations, elemental phenomenological presences speaking of the body in terms of earth, water, air, and, when invoking angels, speaking of fire.

This bodily reference is evident in his *Tools for Conviviality*, eschewing accelerating technology for the sake of bodily life, lived in community with others. The theme has been elusive for scholars and Illich reflects that reading the title of his book requires the French and Latin: "con-viviality." To explain, Illich refers to Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste,* citing the subtitle: *Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy.*[2] One will need both David Hume and Epicurus to grasp the reference to the convivial as this

1 Ivan Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005), 129.

2 Illich refers to Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste: Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*. See Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Handbook of Dining; or Corpulency and Leanness Scientifically Considered*, trans. L. F. Simpson (New York: Appleton, 1865); originally published as *Physiologie du goût ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante. Ouvrage théorique, historique, et à l'ordre du jour, dêdiê aux gastronomes parisiens* [Physiology of Taste, or Meditations on Transcendent Gastronomy: A Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Treatment, Dedicated to the Gastronomes of Paris] (Paris: Charpentier, 1825). For a discussion of the reference both to critical theoretical thinking and the body, see the author's chapter on David Hume and on Friedrich Nietzsche's 'aesthetic science' in Babich, ed., *Reading David Hume's Standard of Taste* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 213-239.

Babette Babich, babich@fordham.edu
Babich, B. Reading Ivan Illich on the Elemental Body.
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 184 - 215

presupposes as Illich later underlines, a theological austerity linked to Aquinas and Hugo Rahner's definition of "*eutrapelia*" as "playful grace."[3] Rahner himself saves the point for his final chapter (rather than beginning with it as Illich does), as a "forgotten virtue."[4]

Illich begins by emphasizing that his earlier analysis in *Deschooling Society* had uncovered a fundamental "paradigm" that could be extended (Michel de Certeau will repeat Illich's parallel almost verbatim) to "other industrial enterprises, each producing a service commodity, each organized as a public utility, and each defining its output as a basic necessity."[5]

Qua schooled, we are programmed to expect certain kinds of intervention:

> People who are hooked on teaching are conditioned to be customers for everything else. They see their own personal growth as an accumulation of institutional outputs, and prefer what institutions *make* over what they themselves can do. They repress the ability to discover reality by their own lights.[6]

Thereby it is the doctors themselves — and only the doctors, or as in the case of a 'standard of care,' the purveyors of pharmaceuticals, who define the scales assessing the success of medicine which permits the "pretence of doctors that they provided people with superior health."[7] At issue is the tradeoff between supposed health, the ideal (always falsifiable but

3 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Marion Boyars, 2009), 6.

4 Hugo v. Rahner, *Man at Play*, Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinn, trans. (Providence: Cluny Media, 1972), 117. [Original: *Der spielende Mensch* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1957)].

5 Illich, *Conviviality*, 4.

6 Illich, *Conviviality*, 80.

7 Illich, *Conviviality*, 9.

only 'too late') of living longer, and the often extreme bodily insult exacted in terms of vitality and conviviality in exchange:

> The cost of healing was dwarfed by the cost of extending sick life; more people survived longer months with their lives hanging on a plastic tube, imprisoned in iron lungs, or hooked onto kidney machines.[8]

As Illich goes on to point out,

> Ninety percent of all medical care for patients with terminal diseases is unrelated to their health; such treatment tends to increase suffering and disability without demonstrably lengthening life.[9]

I have argued elsewhere that no part of what Illich details here has changed in the interim: not the percentage (if anything, as other studies have confirmed Illich's assessments, it is worse) and certainly not patient demands for more and more of such 'futile' treatments.[10] But Illich argues that attention to the one's own felt bodily reality with respect to medical intervention remains necessary as "society"

> can have no quantitative standards by which to add up the negative value of illusion, social control, prolonged suffering, loneliness, genetic deterioration, and frustration produced by medical treatment.[11]

It may be argued that the body, for Illich, offers the key to unlocking the spiritual.

Thus Illich repeatedly visits the parable of the Good

8 Illich, *Conviviality*, 9.

9 Illich, *Conviviality*, 96.

10 Babich, "Ivan Illich's Medical Nemesis and the 'Age of the Show': On the Expropriation of Death," *Nursing Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2018): 1-14.

11 Illich, *Conviviality*, 14.

Samaritan: unpacking the Greek ἐσπλαγχνίσθη in Luke 10:33, usually translated as 'compassion,' taking care to remind the reader of a gut compulsion (the reference in ancient Greek is to the bowel and a painful torsion). Highlighting the radicality of the Samaritan's assistance — not utterly unlike Samuel Beckett's indictment of the zero-sum violence of charity, "Against the charitable gesture there is no defence"[12] — has left some wondering, as Illich recalls, how to unpack "the new freedom which allows the Samaritan to step outside his own milieu and pick up that half-dead Jew in the ditch."[13] How is that "freedom"? Intensifying the point — Beckett's "kind lady" of the Salvation Army pales by comparison —

> Perhaps today we would call that Samaritan an intolerable and violent Palestinian since the point of Jesus' story was that the one who helped was a foreigner, and even an enemy to the man in the ditch.[14]

Illich underlines that the beaten Jew will have to choose to accept this help as every offer of assistance must be chosen in return, as freely as the assistance is freely offered. At the same time, the same choice, volition, freedom, enables "the possibility of its breakage … denial, infidelity, turning away, coldness."[15]

Here I reflect on the elements of earth, water, air, and fire in Illich's thinking. But today, an era Illich described as 'the age of the show,' that is, the era of social media and omnipresent/invisible surveillance, "the" elements would seem to have vanished along with their reference to the body:

12 I know Beckett's phrase as repeated for decades by my (very) Protestant husband who knew organized religion as the son of a congregationalist minister who worked for World YMCA, Tracy Burr Strong (1943-2022).

13 Illich, *Rivers*, 95.

14 Illich, *Rivers*, 95.

15 Illich, *Rivers*, 52.

> New optical techniques were used to remove the picture of reality from the space within which the fingers can handle, the nose can smell, and the tongue can taste it, and show it in a new "objective" isometric space into which no sentient being can enter. We are threatened by the emergence of an epoch that takes the show for image.[16]

What is more, a focus on theology can tend to obscure Illich's formation as a historian. Contrary to popular assertions (by none less than Gov. Jerry Brown) and by received scholarship including *Illich* scholarship, we will need Illich's formation as a historian to understand his insights on the body, in particular. This is not surprising since, as Nietzsche points out in his *Twilight of the Idols*, the body has managed to frustrate philosophers for millennia:

> '…And away above all with the body, that pitiable *idée fixe* of the senses! Infected with every error of logic there is, refuted, impossible even, notwithstanding it is impudent enough to behave as if it actually existed' …[17]

Speaking here of philosophizing "with a *hammer*," referring to the (medical or musical) hammer or diapason used to sound out bodies, Nietzsche, like Illich, refers to the way the bowels reply with a "famous hollow sound which speaks".[18] At stake, for Illich, is the mystery of incarnation: *ensarcosis*. And to this same extent, Illich makes Nietzsche's point more radically, in terms of *conspiratio*, "My inner sphere, atmosphere, and horizon is not one of

16 Illich: "Guarding the Eye in the Age of the Show," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 28 (Autumn, 1995): 47-61.

17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, R.J. Hollingdale, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), ('Reason in Philosophy' 1), 35.

18 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, 21.

dread but one of union with the Lord of the universe, who became a man to make me divine."[19] Thus in his conversations with David Cayley, Illich, like a preacher, varies key points, noting with respect to the context of incarnation, the "coldness" mentioned above. The other side of the same mystery, deity becomes flesh, coldness is also a testament to the mystery of apotheosis, the human divinized.[20]

I. Earth

Earth as Body

From one point of view, the surface view, it can seem as if the majority of Illich's bodily references are earthly. And to speak of peace, invoking the sacrament of the mass and thus the kiss of peace, Illich resorts to the earth. In his Bremen lecture of 1998,[21] Illich recalls at some length the ethnographic challenge of explaining 'peace' in a lecture he had earlier given in Japan, 35 years after the end of World War II and its bombs, to a people who could not but the somatic illustration of the Roman sense of *pax* he is compelled to give as historian and Latin philologist, disquieting in a bodily fashion, that is revulsion:

> *conspiratio*, that is, a breathing into each other's mouths. That's what Christians did. They came together to eat and to kiss, to kiss on the mouth. In this way they shared the Holy Spirit and became members of a community in flesh, blood, and spirit.[22]

19 Illich, *Rivers*, 99.

20 Illich, *Rivers*, 99.

21 Illich, "The Cultivation of Conspiracy" in: Lee Hoinacki et Carl Mitcham, eds., *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 233-242.

22 Illich, *Rivers*, 85.

In an effort to allow his Japanese interlocutors to hear the meaning of peace/'pax,' Illich acknowledged the collision of visceral, bodily sensibilities and to bridge two cultures, Illich invokes *fûdo* — wind *and* earth, in the lecture he gave in German, emphasizing the German title of Watsuji's Tetsurō's (1889-1960) 1935 book *Wind und Erde*.[23] Tetsurō's book title is badly rendered in English as 'climate' (one will need *milieu* with its differentiations along with Illich's *atmosphere*) and to this extent we may read Illich as a caution against co-opting Tetsurō for the sake of today's political thematization of 'climate change.' Neto Leão's reflections on the idea of a *pax oecologica* sets the timeliness of Illich's reflections on our own insistence on 'climate' not for the sake of business as usual, but for business accelerated by disaster and increasingly unchecked greed.[24]

To explain peace as *amicitia*, friendship, required indirection by way of a term familiar to his listeners, telling his interlocutors in Bremen that the 'iconogram' in question was lacking:

> My teacher, Professor Tamanoy, explained *fûdo* to me as "the inimitable freshness that arises from the commingling of a particular soil with the appropriate waters." Trusting my learned pacifist guide, since deceased, I started from the notion of *fûdo*.

The words Illich recalls from his teacher's definition invoke a bodily aesthetic as a recollection of the earth.[25]

23 Watsuji Tetsurō, *Fûdo, Wind und Erde. Der Zusammenhang zwischen Klima und Kultur*, Dora Fischer-Barnicol and Okochi Ryogi, trans. (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992). Watsuji Tetsurō, *Climate: A Philosophical Study*, Geoffrey Bownas, trans. (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1961 [1935]), 1. Watsuji Tetsurō, *Fûdo, le milieu humaine*, Commentaire et traduction par Augustin Berque (Paris: CNRS, 2011). We use the French *milieu* in English to refer to the body, thanks to the physiologist (*and* thoughtless vivisectionist), Claude Bernard.

24 Neto Leão, "Against *pax oecologica*," *Conspiratio* (Fall 2022): 67-78.

25 I try to explore some of this in an essay on the question of technology that is

William Blake, Elohim Creating Adam, 1795. Public Domain.

The viscerality of Illich's references can be striking and he emphasizes this in the conversation David Cayley has preserved, thus he tells us that "earth is something you have to use all your senses to grasp, to feel. Earth is something that you can smell."[26] It is this same aesthetic to which Illich has recourse to explain Hugh of St Victor's metaphors for the book as "a humble clay tablet, like Adam's body before the Creator breathed spirit into its face."[27] Crucially, Illich combines elements, *fûdo* refers to soil — along with "the appropriate waters" — and Illich also uses

always related to Illich with specific reference to Heidegger: Babich, "Heidegger on Technology and *Gelassenheit*: *wabi-sabi* and the Art of Verfallenheit," *AI & SOCIETY. Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Communication* (August 2015): 1-10.

26 David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1992), 287.

27 Illich, *n the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 50.

the metaphor of sandiness to speak of his own aging body, "I feel completely sandy, washed out, dry."[28]

Reading with the Body

In the Vineyard of the Text, Illich details the monkish relation to the book,[29] relying not only on the rhythmic analyses of classical philology crucial to reading Latin (with its Western stress ictus) and ancient Greek (alien to us in the West, as Nietzsche argued as ancient Greek had only a pitch ictus),[30] but also for the training of memory.[31] In the same physiognomic fashion, Illich traces the letters themselves: edges, cuts, bodily forms. This physiognomics is crucial, Illich emphasizes, to the very singular invention of the Greek alphabet, as scholars "increasingly recognize that truly phonetic writing was a one-time invention, made in Greece around 770 B.C."[32] Drawing on a range of other studies,[33] Illich reflects that ancient Greek had "no word for 'a word' singly identified."[34] Key here would be the *physicality* of the articulated word, the word given breath. For Illich,

28 Illich, *Rivers*, 209.

29 Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 60-61.

30 I discuss this complicated notion in the last third of *The Hallelujah Effect* (London: Routledge, 2016 [2013]).

31 Illich, *Vineyard*, 41. This emphasis on bodily walking through or 'running' the memory palace distinguishes Illich's account from more common readings of rhetoric (Mary Carruthers, Brian Vickers, even Francis Yates with her focus on Bruno). More on this below.

32 Illich, *Vineyard*, 39. Illich is too careful a historian not to note the complex limitation of script to a given language as such.

33 Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). It is well worth attending to Illich's footnotes in both *The Mirror of the Past* and *In the Vineyard of the Text* for further references and these may be supplemented with Nietzsche on Greek prosody. For further references (to a convergent tradition): Babich, *Nietzsches Antike* (Berlin: Academia, 2021).

34 Illich, *Vineyard*, 39.

> Greek had only various terms referring to sounds and other signals or expressions: utterances could be articulated by the lips, the tongue, or the mouth, but also by the heart when it spoke to the friend by the *thymos* (which we might call "gall") which rose in Achilles and drove him into battle, or by the onrush of a wave of blood.[35]

Thus ancient Greek writing is literally a "recording technology" attuned to sound. It is the vehicle of an oral, an acoustic or specifically *hearing* culture for which it uses visual culture:

> In fact, the alphabet is an elegant technology for the visualisation of sounds. Its two dozen shapes trigger the memory of utterances that have been articulated by the mouth, the tongue, *oi*: the lips and filter out what is said by gesture, mime, or the guts. Unlike other writing systems, it records sounds not ideas. And in this it is foolproof: readers can be trained to voice things which they have never heard before.[36]

Thus, and here the haptic is key along with metonymy, Illich explains that preliterate "Greek speechmaking and epic singing were based not on visual memory but on the recollection of formulas uttered to the rhythm of a lyre."[37]

The musicologist, Ernest McClain (1918-2014), draws attention to the same phenomenon in *The Pythagorean Plato*,[38] and he would later extend the point to the

35 Illich, *Vineyard*, 39.

36 Illich, *Vineyard*, 39.

37 Again, Nietzsche had made this case almost a century earlier. For his part, Illich refers to Berkley Peabody, *The Winged Word: A Study in the Technique of Ancient Greek Oral Composition as Seen Principally through Hesiod's Works and Days* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

38 Ernest McClain, *The Pythagorean Plato: Prelude to the Song Itself* (York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 1978).

Hebrew bible.[39] Illich's point is philologically impeccable and already to be found in Aristotle:

> Leucippus and his associate Democritus say that the full and the empty are the elements calling the one being and the other non-being: the full and solid being being the empty non-being. One substance (for them) generates all things … and does so by three modifications, which are these: shape, order, and position. They say that the real is differentiated only by "rhythm" and "inter-contact" and "turning". Of these, rhythm is shape, inter-contact is order, and turning is position. A differs in shape from N. AN differs from NA in order. H differs from Z in position.[40]

Commenting on Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Antonio de Nicolàs (1930-2022) explains the ancient Greek tradition in its Platonic constellation in connection with music and mysticism as inspiring Ignatius' spiritual exercises of bodily attuned reading/imagination, arguing that

> For the Greeks, the world resembled Apollo's lute. This was a visible image because for the Greeks *idea* and *eidos*, thinking and representation, were one inseparable act, a text in our sense. It was probably not only the so-called Pythagoreans, but Pythagoras himself who assumed a fourfold harmony in the world: the harmony of the strings, of the body and soul, of the state, of the starry sky.[41]

39 See, for an illustrated explication, McClain's "A Priestly View of Bible Arithmetic: Deity's Regulative Aesthetic Activity within Davidic Musicology," in Babich, ed., *Hermeneutic Philosophy of Science, Van Gogh's Eyes, and God: Essays on Patrick A Heelan, S.J.* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), 429-444.

40 Ivan Illich, *Vineyard*, 39.

41 de Nicolás, *Powers of Imagining*, 21. Referring to McClain, we read: "Plato needs to be studied anew from the perspective of a dialectics conceived on a musical map that

Illich himself refers the reader to the French Jesuit ethno-linguist, Marcel Jousse (1886-1961) on orality and rhythm. This corresponds to the bodily mnemotechnics of prayer and its cultural antecedents:

> When the child is rocked during a cradle song, when the reapers bow to the rhythm of a harvest song, when the rabbi shakes his head while he prays or searches for the right answer, or when the proverb comes to mind only upon tapping for a while — according to Jousse, these are just a few examples of a widespread linkage of utterance and gesture.[42]

The body also embraces reference to the friend and explicating Hugh of St. Victor, Illich writes: Friendship is the word in Hugh for that love of wisdom, which is *sapientia,* or tasteful knowledge. The friend is *paradisus homo*."[43] The bodily language of Illich's gloss is both mystical and sensual, needed to speak of the friend: "his very first presence is beatifying; friendship is a garden, a tree of life, wings for the flight to God ... Sweetness, light, fire, wound ... Paradise regained.[44]

Body Memory and the Money Changers: Hopscotch and Cartography

In addition to the illumination of light in reading as well as the pronunciation that aided a slower "chewing" of the text,[45]

preserves not only the musical model of the past but contributes a clear description of the technologies involved in the use of such a map." *Powers of Imagining*, 22.

42 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 34 985b, cited in Illich, *Vineyard*, 39.

43 Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 27.

44 Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 27.

45 See Illich's own text as well as Nietzsche on the need for hearing with one's eyes (reading aloud), but see also Paul Saenger, *Spaces Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Illich emphasizes the bodily relation to the word.[46] Accounts of memory palaces are familiar to us, as noted above, even if poorly understood — one is meant to memorize a series of *loci*. Drawing in part on illustrations in Robert Fludd (1574-1637)[47] Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), Illich explains Hugh of St Victor's reference to the "treasure chest in your heart," Illich cites the "many hiding places in your heart: here for gold, there for silver, elsewhere again for precious stones ..."[48] The reference to the body is key:

> You must learn to distinguish these spots to know which is where, in order to remember where you have placed this thing or that. Just observe the moneychanger in the market and do like him. See how his hand darts into the appropriate satchel ... and instantly draws out the right coin.[49]

The young monk learns to imagine a game of bodily 'hopscotch,' as we may describe Illich's example,[50] learning to

> place each Apostle into the row of Apostles, each Patriarch in the row of Patriarchs, and then trains him to dart back and forth between distinct columns. Certain sentences are used to train the memory, "mnemotechnic phrases." An example is: "In six days the world was perfectly created, and in six epochs man was redeemed." In Paris, one century before the university came into being and the year before the first preserved rudimentary al-

46 "Each reader, whether chanter or listener, understands the lines by moving to their beat, remembers them by recapturing their rhythm, and thinks of them in terms of putting them into his mouth and chewing." Illich, *Vineyard*.

47 Illich cites: Robert Fludd, *Utriusque cosmic maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica* (Oppenhemii: Ære Johan-Theodori de Bry, typis Hieronymi Galleri, 1617-21).

48 Illich, *Vineyard*, 35-36.

49 Illich, *Vineyard*, 36.

50 Illich, *Vineyard*, 41.

> phabetic subject index was concocted, this was the training for reference work given to the child monk.[51]

The physiognomic is crucial and not a matter of mere encumbrance:

> The child's mind was trained to build the memory mazes, and to establish the habit to dart and retrieve in them. Remembrance was not conceived as an act of mapping but of psychomotor, morally charged activity.[52]

For Illich, key to the mediaeval context is the "fundamental development by Hugh of the memory matrix from an architectonic static to a historic-relational model."[53] In this way, the spatial model, thus the reference to hopscotch, refers to a spatial transformation of a mentally constructed memory palace:

> Hugh's rows of numbers that run to the horizon are a flat replica of the same device. To become the student of a reputable teacher, the pupil had to prove that he was at home and at ease in some vast architecture that existed only in his mind, and within which he could move at an instant to the spot of his choice.[54]

The physiological memory parallel Illich draws does not require faith or the medieval monastic tradition, one can have this digitally or by reading a book in more prosaic circumstances as a matter of cartography, provided the imagination is 'trained' as Illich mentions the topographical maps that had served him as a boy in Vienna, given to bodily undertakings: "As a modern youth, from childhood on I was trained to the

51 Illich, *Vineyard*, 36-37.

52 Illich, *Vineyard*, 37.

53 Illich, *Vineyard*, 38.

54 Illich, *Vineyard*, 41.

Baedeker. As a mountain guide I learned to decipher maps and photographs before venturing into the rock."[55]

For Illich, the bodily is decisive for lived-world, "mapless orientation" and today, post GPS dependency and its syndromes, we may be less 'qualified' to orient ourselves in this way:

> Decades later, when I first arrived in Japan, I purchased a map of Tokyo. But I was not allowed to use it. My host's wife simply refused to let me map my way through the city's mazes by looking at them, mentally, from above. Day after day she led me around this, and that corner, until I could navigate the labyrinth and reach my destinations without ever knowing abstractly where I was. Reference work before the table of contents and the index must have been much more like this kind of mapless orientation for which our modern schools disqualify us.[56]

55 Illich, *Vineyard*, 37.

56 Illich, *Vineyard*, 37.

II. Water

Gustave Courbet, La Source, 1862.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC.
Public Domain.

Gustave Courbet, La Source, 1868.
Musée D'Orsay, Paris.
Public Domain.

H20 and the Waters of Forgetfulness begins with a striking claim using the history of art as evidence: "Only the late nineteenth century tied female nudity as a cultural symbol to the tap water of the bathroom."[57] At issue are a range of 19th century paintings which Illich does not reproduce in his own text but detail for flattening out their subject and making an exception for Courbet's *La Source*. Thus Illich explains:

57 Illich, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of Stuff* (Dallas: Dallas Inst Humanities & Culture, 1985), 1.

> The evolution of the subtle ties between water and the nude can be observed, in all its complexity, in the paintings of the period. The painter found it less and less necessary to justify the nude by presenting her in religious or mythological terms. By showing her as bather he could merge woman and water as part of "nature." Only a rare genius such as Courbet could successfully paint *The Source* as a woman of incredible specificity, utterly lacking in self-consciousness yet bluntly assertive of her flesh.[58]

Whatever Courbet's model might be about and whatever the symbolism of water, Illich's "self-assertive" language can seem inaccurate at least from the point of view of the woman herself, whether to describe *her* own focus on her own flesh (she is turned away from the viewer) but corresponds to the painter's/viewer's viewpoint or assessment. Illich's painterly referent is ambiguous as Courbet painted the same theme with the same name six years later, on display today in the Musée D'Orsay. In either case, the same qualification about bodily or fleshly self-assertion would hold.

Here, Illich's audience may be puzzled — was Illich not a priest? How appropriate can it be for him, of all people, to be referencing nudes? The occasion for the lecture was a water processing plant newly commissioned in Dallas. The reference to the nude is a distraction and (apart from Courbet), Illich's point is that

> For the run-of-the-mill painter, this association of flesh with water served to render the feminine body innocuous. First, in the course of Ingres's long life, the term nude became synonymous with the Turkish bath. Then the aging Degas filled his atelier with tubs, bowls, and basins in which to pose his models. His pastels offer a

58 Illich, *H2O*, 1.

> historical source for the domestic bath during the late nineteenth century. [59]

What is at work for Illich, as historian, is a shift in consciousness:

> The intertwining of urban water and the nude constitutes one of the strands of a taboo woven to protect the symbolism of public water use from analysis. We may, for instance, debate quite openly our selection of the architect who will dress up the stuff that runs through Dallas pipes. We feel free to criticize the way he displays it, makes it dance or sparkle. But we do not feel free to question the natural beauty of water itself because we know, yet cannot bear to acknowledge, that this "stuff" is recycled toilet flush.[60]

Invoking a traditionalist ethos regarding the female body, speaking of the "evolution of the subtle ties between water and the nude," Illich's point is that conventional depictions of the nude in the bath or in a water source are ways to represent the nakedness of female flesh.[61]

Illich refers to the traditions of water across different cultures and reflects on our myths and imaginaries in the wake of the chemist-philosopher, Gaston Bachelard's *Water and Dreams*, as this was Illich's prompt from the organizers of the 1984 Dallas conference. Given his scientific training, Illich reminds us that elementally, water is intrinsically dyadic.

59 Illich, *H2O*, 2.

60 Illich, *H20 and the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of Stuff* (Dallas: Dallas Inst Humanities & Culture, 1985), 3.

61 Although he does not refer to Illich, I have had conversations with Alexander Nehamas about this distinction, see Nehamas, *A Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). See my discussion of the difference between artistic depictions of male/female bodies (and our assumptions) in the first third of Babich, *The Hallelujah Effect* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Here it is not only the molecular compound H_2O Illich has in mind, hydrogen and oxygen, but the 'material' or 'stuff' of water (the German for the element of hydrogen is *Wasserstoff*): "The substance that is considered 'water' or 'fire' varies with culture and epoch. And water is always dual."[62] Thus Illich can remind us that the Vedic tradition of *soma* is a fluid *fire* and that eros and passion also refer to fire.

Primal as water is, Illich as historian, reminds us to ask about the cultural-historical aspects of our collective relation to water. Thus plumbing, not merely running water but water closets and toilets go back, along with the technology of the same, to the ancients. Setting modern technological accomplishments in context, Illich reminds his Dallas audience of the radical technological leap that was Roman engineering:

> By A.D. 97, Rome had become a city of one million inhabitants. Nine major aqueducts with a total length of approximately 250 miles brought 100 gallons of water per capita into the city. How much water this is, one can grasp only by comparison. London, Frankfurt, and Paris had eight-tenths of a gallon per capita in 1823 and approximately ten gallons per capita in 1936. Rome in A.D. 100 used ten times this amount of piped water.[63]

Foregrounding the connection with toilets and other less salutary associations with water in connection with municipal water recycling plant,[64] Illich reflects that dwelling on such details, even the mere mention is bad enough, as we city dwellers, with our municipal water, inevitably shower or

62 Illich, *H2O*, 4.

63 Illich, *H2O*, 36-37.

64 See also for a video of this address given in Texas for the Dallas Institute in 1984, "Ivan Illich on Water and the History of the Senses," https://youtu.be/BrtO8kPdlRg.

bathe in "recycled toilet flush."[65] Thus 'the waters of forgetfulness' of Illich's complete title refers to the body and all its traces as what is to be elided. Today, most of us have become migrants in our own lives, dwelling nowhere:

> Most people do not dwell in the place where they spend their days and leave no traces in the place where they spend their nights. They spend their days next to a telephone in an office and their nights garaged next to their cars.[66]

The obligation to pay a rent or a mortgage for a home is new, as Illich reminds us, for everyone *including* the poor who formerly could live rent free, as Illich emphasizes, in slums and ramshackle dwellings. Illich spends considerable time analysing the dynamic architectonics of the favela. Recalling a landscape of polluted rivers, Illich highlights the architecture of underdevelopment which corporate development paves over, adding new problems along the way:

> That landscape no longer exists; cars now fill a highway hiding the sewage. The skin and scalp of Indians is no longer the habitat of lice; now the allergies produced by industrial chemicals cause the itch.[67]

Nevertheless, like Joni Mitchell's 'clouds', what we remember about water (thus forgetfulness) is what the popular mind allows. Thus, Illich draws our attention to the signifiers of modern (and often commercial) dreams of water:

> The popular wisdom which holds that water possesses "natural beauty" and that this beauty has impact on civic

65 Illich, *H2O*, 3.

66 Illich, *H2O*, 10.

67 Illich, "Conspiracy," 238.

> morale is not always overtly expressed. However, you have only to poke fun at the belief in the civic magic of a body of water, and people react as if you had made a dirty joke.[68]

Both images are specifically historical constructions requiring a specific hermeneutic:

> This, I claim, is so because water, which has always been perceived as the feminine element of nature, in the nineteenth century was tied to a new "hygienic" image of woman, which was itself a creation of the Victorian age.[69]

This in turn gives us a hint of the waters Illich will invoke to speak of his death, of our deaths,

> Following dream waters upstream, the historian will learn to distinguish the vast register of their voices. As his ear is attuned to the music of deep waters, he will hear a discordant sound that is foreign to waters, that reverberates through the plumbing of modern cities. He will recognize that the H2O which gurgles through Dallas plumbing is not water, but a stuff which industrial society creates.[70]

Here at issue is a symbolic and real (and thus Lacanian) interface:

> Pleasure boats, temperatures, and the reflection of skyscrapers are not my concern here. I want to deal with waters and dreams. I want to explore the moral and psychological consequences that will flow from the public display of recirculated toilet flush with pretends to the aesthetic symbol of a wedding between water and urban space.[71]

68 Illich, *H2O*, 2.

69 Illich, *H2O*, 2.

70 Illich, *H2O*, 5.

71 Illich, *H2O*, 9.

Highlighting the accretionary, dynamic character of life for most of humanity throughout most of its past, Illich, without referring to Heidegger's *Being, Dwelling, Thinking* makes part of the point Heidegger makes for the sake of which Illich refers to time:

> Traditional dwellings are never terminated. Houses constantly grow; only temples and palaces can be "finished." Dwelling means living insofar as each moment shapes a community's own kind of space. "Dwelling" in this strong sense cannot really be distinguished from living. From day-to-day dwellers shape the environment. In every step and movement people dwell.[72]

Here I am concerned with Illich's account of life and the destruction of and the recurrence again, and this is true to the current day, of the *favela*:

> Yet it is due perhaps to this incongruity that a *favela* once established does not go away just because its site has been bulldozed. Within weeks, even overnight, the same *favela* will be there again. If you watch in the evening after sunset, a hundred families will climb over the barricades carrying poles, mats, and infants. By dawn, dozens of women will emerge from the wobbly shelters to line up — as they have always done — and fill their buckets at the nearby spigot. For the most part, they will be different people from those who have just been carted away. Not the same people, perhaps, but the same *favela* has returned to its visible life.[73]

72 Illich, *H2O*, 9.

73 Illich, *H2O*, 19.

Illich is not a romantic and cement works a charm as always:

> When a parking lot is built or public housing rises on the site, the squatter can return no more. The ancients believed in their power to undo ritual space; they knew that it was a social creation. Architects can only condemn it and bury it under cement. And, as the world is cemented over, dwelling space is extinguished. It survives only in cracks and niches. Most people are forced to acquire costly space in which they cannot dwell.[74]

If Illich can explain, drawing on theology and ancient gnostic myth to do so:

> The distinction between purification and cleansing is obvious yet difficult to clarify. The late archaic transformation of miasma in Greece, followed by the gnostic tradition and baptismal theology, has jumbled purifying blessing and detergent scrubbing under the emblem of "water" that determines modern sensibilities.[75]

The 'waters of forgetfulness' are ontic affairs, as Heidegger would say, as plumbing disposes of the products of digestion along with dust and mud and fatigue of everyday life:

> In contrast with this negative reference to the condition that calls for purification, Inda-Germanic languages possess a rich register for referring to the conditions that require cleansing. "Miasma" that can be washed away is given in bold and direct terms as something that sticks to the skin, such as soil (soiled), shit (a word that comes from the same root as "dirt" and "dirty"), foul things (filthy), dung (from Old Germanic quat, *Kot*), glue or sap (*sucio*, *sudicio*)

74 Illich, *H2O*, 19.

75 Illich, *H2O*, 27-28.

> or mud (Irish loth, from the same root as Latin *lutum*).[76]

The body produces the 'miasma' that needs to be purified and which, as we are bodily beings, we are especially apt in sensing as water: "acts as a solvent (it ab-solves), detaches these leftovers of past activities and disengages the person from an encumbrance."[77]

Here the reference, again, is to Illich's phrasing of the 'rivers north of the future,' bodily death as traditionally connected with the river *Lethe*:

> All mythic waters feed a source that is located on the other side. The streams carry the memories that Lethe has washed from the feet of the dead to this well thereby turning dead men into mere shadows.[78]

Important for hermeneutics, memory is the adoptive mother of Hermes,[79] god of mediations, transitions, the companion god who moves soul from the land of the living to the land of the dead, who communicates between gods and mortals: "Even the immortals must draw on the waters of his titanic mother if they want to remember."[80]

III. Air: Aura and Smell, Atmosphere and Spirit

A philosopher of aura and bodily atmosphere, Illich talks about smells, shocking readers by telling them not about the aura about which Walter Benjamin writes, mystically, indirectly (although Benjamin's description is just as physically

76 Illich, *H2O*, 28.

77 Illich, *H2O*, 28.

78 Illich, *H2O*, 31.

79 It is memory who adopts the son of Maya, the "shamefaced" or "awful" nymph, and thus makes him the son of two mothers. She provides Hermes with his two unique gifts: a lyre and "soul." Illich, *H2O*, 31-32.

80 Illich, *H2O*, 32.

visceral as he writes of the smell of old books or artifacts), but the nose, a favoured metaphor for Illich, "a wandering Jew and a Christian pilgrim."[81] We need a nose, Illich tells us, "to sense an aura":

> The nose, framed by the eyes, runs below the brain. What the nose inhales ends in the guts; every yogi and hesichast knows this. The nose curves down in the middle of the face. Pious Jews are conscious of the image because what the Christians call "walking in the sight of God" the Hebrews express as "ambling under God's nose and breath." To savor the feel of a place, you trust your nose; to trust another, you must first smell him.[82]

The reference to the yogi or the hesychast (think the monks on Mount Athos) is esoteric enough but Illich links the two, just as he reminds us that asceticism is repetition, as the bodybuilder knocks out reps or divides his week into days to focus on exercising one part of the body, to allow the rhythm of growth. In the same way, Illich illuminates what he means by atmosphere, this is the element of air, along with the dangers of institutionalization.

In the Vineyard of the Text is dedicated to the atmosphere of the monastery and to this extent, the "hesychast" is not a casual reference. Recalling the different stations, "epochs," in his own life, Illich explains,

> I have never doubted—and it's even more true today—that a "monastic" ambience is the prerequisite to the independence needed for a historically based indictment of society.[83]

81 Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 147.

82 Illich, "Conspiracy," 237. See further, my discussion of "L'atmosphère, le parfum et la politique de l'utopie : Lucien, Nietzsche, et Illich," *Diogène. Revue internationale des sciences humaines*, n° 273-274 (janvier-juin 2021 [2022]):124-146.

83 Illich, "Conspiracy," 235.

Albert Joseph Moore, The Loves of the Winds and the Seasons, 1863. Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery. Public Domain.

The body and its aura, its airs, its atmospheric element, permeates Illich's reflections in his 1998 "The Cultivation of Conspiracy" as he also muses on the sensed *genius loci* of various places —not only monastic installations or his youthful sojourns on the islands around the Dalmatian coastline, but Illich confesses the utopic longing that is an accompaniment to the onset of age, musing (at his own expense), joking to a Bremen audience who lives where he lives (and knows what he is talking about), of the contrast, walking

> through the pastures along the Wümme that are flooded twice a day by the tide from the North Atlantic? I who, as a boy, had felt exiled in Vienna, because all my senses were longingly attached to the South, to the blue Adriatic, to the limestone

> mountains in the Dalmatia of my early childhood.[84]

This is a rhetorical device used by a long expert preacher, speaker. Thus the 'atmosphere' of the 2nd Century Lucian inspires Goethe when the poet asks (in Pindar's voice) if one "knows the land, where the lemons blossom."[85]

Illich's references to aura and atmosphere are crucial as he explains some of the reasons that would lead him to dissolve the institution he had founded, his "'thinkery' ['*Denkerei*'] in Mexico, … the Centro Intercultural de Documentación or CIDOC."[86] Here the element of air offers another reference to aura, to spirit. The dynamic is both inevitable and elusive:

> …atmosphere invites the institutionalization that will corrupt it. You never know what will nurture the spirit of *philia*, while you can be certain what will smother it. Spirit emerges by surprise, and it's a miracle when it abides; it is stifled by every attempt to secure it; it's debauched when you try to use it.[87]

Illich emphasizes the faint memory the nose detects, an 'aura' that reminds one of a given evening, old companions, or simply the taste of wine. The aura remains and that requires the

84 Illich, "Conspiracy," 234.

85 "Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn, Im dunkeln Laub die Goldorangen glühn, Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht, Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht, Kennst du es wohl? Dahin! Dahin! Möchte' ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter, ziehn!" Cited after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*, in Goethe, *Les Œuvres de Goethe, Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand, Erster Band* (Stuttgart et Tübingen, in der J.G.Cottaschen Buchhandlung, 1827), 177. For a discussion, see, broadly and just as bodily: Martina Kolb, "Goethe's Citrus, Nietzsche's Figs, and Benn's Olive: Poetic Reverie, Erotic Fantasy, and Botanic Agency," *Monatshefte*, Vol. 106, n° 2 (été 2014) : 171-199 and on the halcyonic, it is useful to consult the final chapter of Gary Shapiro, *Alcyone. Nietzsche on Gifts, Noise, and Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

86 Illich, "Conspiracy," 236.

87 Illich, "Conspiracy," 236.

sense of smell. Here there is a shock to our sensibilities, linguistic but also visceral:

> Some of that sense of mimesis comes out in an old German adage, *Ich kann Dich gut riechen* (I can smell you well), which is still used and understood. But it's something you don't say to just anyone; it's an expression that is permissible only when you feel close, count on trust, and are willing to be hurt.[88]

In his Chicago lecture on "Hospitality and Pain" Illich offers a complex reading of the relationship not only to this vulnerability but pain, crucial as he begins by citing Homer's *Odyssey* to remind us of the difficulty of recognizing those to whom we owe hospitality, as the poet tells us that under the disguise of the aged body, accurate recognition becomes impossible.[89] In the same text, Illich emphasizes the bodily service owed to the sick. This attention to the complexities of vulnerability is part of the reason the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben suggests we would do well to read Illich during the current political circumstance that is the global change in rule and power in the name of supposed 'security.'[90] Blocking bodily proximity and contact as we have done and as some are still inclined to do: wearing a mask, avoiding physical connection with others, is not only a bodily avoidance but a spiritual avoidance. Illich stresses this willingness "to be hurt," required for friendship as for Illich's vocational, priestly attention to those who would

88 Illich, "Conspiracy," 237.

89 Illich, "Hospitality and Pain," Lecture, f David Ramage of McCormick Theological Seminary, 1987. Online: https://www.unifr.ch/orthodoxia/de/assets/public/Lehre/FS2021%20-%20Seminar%20Illich/Illich_Hospitality.pdf.

90 Giorgio Agamben, *Where are We Now? The Epidemic as Politics*, Veleria Dani, trans. (London: Eris Press, 2021). Cf. Babich, "Pseudo-Science and 'Fake' News: 'Inventing' Epidemics and the Police State" in: Irene Strasser and Martin Dege, eds., *The Psychology of Global Crises and Crisis Politics Intervention, Resistance, Decolonization* (London: Springer. 2021), 241-272.

count as 'the least of our brethren.'

This is worth reflecting on, in the context of the same Illich who wrote *Medical Nemesis* to articulate the politics of a profession of a health industry that set surveillance, i.e., regular check-ups, or regimens of tests, in place of curative treatments or healing. During the past few years, the peoples of the world were subjected to the probing invasion of our noses to a degree and on a scale never seen on earth. It remains hard to imagine that 'we' subjected ourselves, and still do, on command, to a set of protocols which remains inscrutable. What were pre-prepared swabs soaked with?, what were they made of, what what was the depth of their insertion?, what was the number of times they were to be rotated inside nasal passages? From the standpoint of the body, these were all elemental and elementary questions left unanswered. None of them drew more than superficial attention. Today, although some philosophers are beginning to pay attention to the sense of smell, none raised an alarm during the pandemic. It is an issue complicated by the fact that the damage done by such bodily violation is not registered as such because one gets used to violations which are repeated. Moreover, as the damage is mostly cognitive, it is that much more difficult to notice injury. Yet, for those who have lost their sense of smell, the loss is often irrecuperable, and the intellectual capacity lost thereby correspondingly hard to estimate.

Illich's bodily-political point has everything to do with proximity and smell, which is also, as already noted, connected with aura. The kiss of peace in the celebration of the mass — Illich adds a discussion of priestly kisses of the bible, of relics, of rings, of other clerics, of the faithful, as all this requires the intimate sharing of breath. As he explains:

> the *conjuratio conspirativa* makes European urbanity distinct from urban modes elsewhere. It also implies a peculiar dynamic strain between the atmosphere of *con-*

> *spiratio* and its legal, contractual constitution. Ideally, the spiritual climate is the source of the city's life that flowers into a hierarchy, like a shell or frame, to protect its order. Insofar as the city is understood to originate in a *conspiratio*, it owes its social existence to the *pax*, the breath, shared equally among all.[91]

The rigor of Illich's historian's reading can escape us, hence the significance of the economic context in the present day as described by Leão's account. If our efforts to improve and institutionalize improvement tend toward "totalitarianism" as Huxley and Orwell have already taught us, Illich reminds us of a complex "*pax*" that cannot be separated from convivial life and for which our new masked order cannot but augur ill. The element of air is clear in this *pax*, insofar as it entails "the breath, shared equally by all."[92] Everything turns on what Illich calls *Umsonstigkeit* — the free, mysterious, and above all unmerited gift of grace.

IV. Fire

Illich, a priest, also invokes bodies of fire, the same angels William Blake saw in his trees and which were discounted by those around him as the kind of thing only poets see.

But fire is also connected with aether and thus with beings beyond the air. This is the heavenly as we may imagine the after-life, beyond the earthly. "Angels," Illich tells us, reminding us of our theology, "are pure spirits."[93] Elementally,

> They have no *materia*; they're not juicy beings. They are beings of pure fire, an extraordinary fire which is taken from God. So these beings had to be given *media*,

91 Illich, "Conspiracy," 242.

92 Illich, "Conspiracy," 242.

93 Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 74.

William Blake, Glad Day or The Dance of Albion, ca.1794.
From Blake, A Large Book of Designs, Copy A, 1793-6. Public Domain.

> intermediaries, means by which they could influence the area of material reality which they were to govern. These were called the heavenly bodies. And in order to allow the immaterial angel to make contact with reality through the spheres, the spheres had to be conceived as a special type of *causa efficiens*, which was totally obedient to the intentional user, who is the angel.[94]

Illich goes on to offer a distinction between blessings as anyone may offer these and sacraments as these require specific instruments and have, if done correctly, at least as medieval theologians

94 Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 74-75.

supposed, the power to 'constrain' deity: "*instrumenta divina*."[95]

Bodies of fire corresponds to the aethereal, the angelic body and Illich gives us more with his repeated reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan and the beaten Jew left for dead in a ditch. For Illich, faith can allow one the confidence in the resurrection. Here we are still on the theme of the body, exemplified by his remembrance of Savonarola as exemplar of a good death, or as Nietzsche would say in a classically Greek voice, a "free death." Illich has taken care to remind us of Savonarola's caution to his monks that the death we are to die is not ours to specify but it is ours to die: "'We are not masters of our own deaths. We must be happy if we can die the death which God has destined for us.'"[96] Illich, the historian, explains, the turns of his argument as logically subtle as ever, that:

> either these are cowards, or they are people dominated by cultural assumptions in popular religiosity in Florence in 1498, or they are, in the fullest, in the most glorious way, clowns, fools, who know what they are doing.[97]

Thus Illich concludes with the hope of one who understands, and his point could not be more beautifully esoteric, "I wish I could die that way."

95 Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 79.

96 Savonarola, cited in Illich, "The Last Days of Savonarola," *In the Rivers North of the Future*, 155.

97 Illich, "The Last Days of Savonarola," *In the Rivers North of the Future*, 156.

The Conspiratio of Ivan Illich and the Kiss of Peace

by Toby Everett

Introduction

This essay aims to elucidate a surprise in the writing of Ivan Illich. It begins and ends with his writing on the mouth-to-mouth kiss of early Christians which he refers to with the term '*conspiratio*'. This essay will argue that Illich is not using *conspiratio* as a historically technical term, but instead as his own unique means of unveiling the surprising nature of early Christian sociality and liturgy, and, even further, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In search of the significance of this term in his work, several adjacent discussions will also be undertaken. The first will consider how to interpret Illich's work and offers a brief survey of his use and understanding of *conspiratio* across his writing and speaking. The second will test Illich's historical and theological insights against other researchers who have commented extensively on the kissing practices of the church. The third will consider how Illich's *conspiratio* relates to his concept of peace and will argue that the *conspiratio* theologically adjusts his work in its entirety.

Interpreting Illich

Ivan Illich is an ambiguous intellectual who is often unhelpfully labelled with broad titles, such as in *The Powerless Church's* synopsis of Illich as a 'philosopher, theologian, and historian'.[1] While Illich makes important contributions to

1 Ivan Illich, *The Powerless Church and Other Selected Writings, 1955-1985* (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, (2018), back cover.

Toby Everett, tobyneverett@gmail.com
Everett, T. The Conspiratio of Ivan Illich and the Kiss of Peace. Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 216 - 258

these realms of thought, he exceeds, evades, and challenges each. This is compounded, as David Cayley notes, by the distinctly 'occasional' nature of his literary works.[2] These works are constituted by short tracts like *Tools for Conviviality*, historical studies such as *In the Vineyard of the Text*, or as interviews later documented in books such as *The Rivers North of the Future.* Conversely, for Illich's commentators, one word threads together his priestly, academic, and political work – friendship. John McKnight, for example, regards Illich as the 'wildest man and best friend' he has ever known.[3] Further, when Illich is asked about his faith in Jesus in an interview, he responds by saying: 'I don't like to speak about friends in a superficial way'.[4] Here, Illich is not avoiding the question. Rather his answer is expressive of an understanding of friendship as being 'too deeply personal' to speak about easily.[5] Indeed, just as Illich regarded his study of medieval writers such as Hugh of St Victor as fostering friendship,[6] the contemporary reader may relate in a similar manner to Illich, and share in a similar faithful hermeneutic wherein truth is known through careful engagement, trust, and discretion.

In concert with this briefly sketched hermeneutic of friendship, this essay will suggest that reading Illich must be a *peaceful* enterprise. It is an enterprise that Illich himself exemplifies:

2 David Cayley, *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey* (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), p. 14.

3 Lee Hoinacki & Carl Mitcham, ed., *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection*, (New York, State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 51.

4 Tomasz Goetel, Ivan Illich: Un Certain Regard – A 1972 Interview, online video recording, YouTube, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_ByKXCr9TA&t=1208s> [accessed 29th August 2022], 7:52.

5 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 152.

6 David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005), p. 27

> I must talk to you about the recovery of a true sense of peace, while bearing in mind always that I know nothing about your vernacular tongue. Therefore, each word I will speak today will remind me of the difficulty of putting peace into words. To me, it seems that each people's peace is as distinct as each people's poetry.[7]

With these words, Illich acknowledges the care that needs to accompany one's search for a meaning that remains implicated in a vernacular and that 'cannot be exported'.[8] Consequently, I contend that interpreters of Illich should take care to avoid offering pithy or concise summaries of his ideas and be slow to critique others for doing the same. Both Giorgio Agamben's suggestion that 'the entirety of Illich's thought appears as a thought of the kingdom',[9] or David Cayley's suspicion of an underlying commitment to 'complementarity',[10] betray the peaceful reflections of a friend. This essay aims to provide a similarly faithful approach to Illich's writing as it is shaped by the personal nature of peace.

The *Conspiratio* of Ivan Illich: Background to the Term.

With the word '*conspiratio*', Illich alludes to what he understands as being a central ritual in the early Christian church. However, this essay will argue that Illich doesn't use *conspiratio* as a technical term or as a direct synonym for Christian ritual kissing. Rather, it will be demonstrated that Illich uniquely uses the term to elucidate surprising and mys-

7 Ivan Illich, 'The De-Linking of Peace and Development' in *In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses 1978-1990*, ed. By Valentina Borremans (London, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1992), p. 15.

8 Ibid, p. 17.

9 Illich, *Powerless Church*, p. xi.

10 Cayley, *Intellectual Journey*, p. 451.

terious aspects of early Christian practice to contrast his own milieu. In *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley,* Illich first uses the Latin word *conspiratio* to refer to the early Christian practice of 'breathing together into each other's mouths. That's what Christians did. They came together to eat and to kiss, to kiss on the mouth. In this way they shared the Holy Spirit and became members of a community in flesh, blood, and spirit'.[11]

In a follow-up interview two years later, when further asking Illich about the meaning of the *conspiratio,* David Cayley conflates the term with the 'kiss of peace'.[12] Sam Ewell does likewise as he comments on the *conspiratio* while reflecting on Illich's sense of Christian mission.[13] Illich also does the same when he states that the social entity of the church comes into existence by 'sharing the spirit through the kiss of peace, the *conspiratio* of which we spoke'.[14] While these accounts appear to use the term *conspiratio* as a synonym with the kiss of peace, Illich, notably, is the only writer in the history of the Christian church to use the word to refer to the ritual kiss. The term is used sparingly in history for both negative and positive reasons. In one of his epistles, Augustine uses it positively where it is translated as '*unanimous agreement* of Christian people's in the faith (emphasis added)'.[15] He uses it negatively in his commentary on Psalm 143 as people 'conspired for evil ends'.[16] The former sense is used in Dei Verbum 10

11 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 85.

12 Ibid, p. 215.

13 Samuel E. Ewell, *Faith Seeking Conviviality: Reflections on Ivan Illich, Christian Mission, and the Promise of Life Together* (Oregon, Cascade Books, 2020), p.76.

14 Cayley, *Rivers,* p. 143.

15 Saint Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine A Translation for the 21st Century: Letters 156-210, II/3*, trans. by Roland Teske, ed. Boniface Ramsay (New York, New York City Press, 2004), p. 302.

16 Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: 121-150*, trans. by Maria Boulding, ed.

of Vatican II where '*singularis conspiratio*' is translated as the 'single common effort' that should characterise the sharing in and handing on of sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture.[17]

Further, because Illich is unique in his use of the term, it is important to clarify the distinction between Illich's *conspiratio* and the kissing rituals of the early church. With the *conspiratio,* Illich ambiguously refers to the practice of the 'very first Christian centuries',[18] and thus implies that the kiss of peace had a primitive and central relation to the Eucharist. Notably, the first Christian to refer to a ritual kiss as a 'kiss of peace' was the 2nd century Church father, Tertullian, where it was related to prayer and not the Eucharist. Crucially, therefore, this essay will aim to de-link the *conspiratio* from the ritual kiss or kiss of peace in the Christian church, not because the rituals are mutually exclusive, but because conflating them, firstly risks simplifying a complex and varied historical practice and, secondly, risks losing Illich's unique insights into a past reality that contrasts our own.

Illich's unique use of the term instead suggests that he is using it to creatively elucidate the significance of past Christian social practice. This is evident given that, on various occasions in his work, Illich feels compelled to re-use or create new words to highlight and recover senses of the past that are lost in the present. For example, Illich employs the term 'vernacular' to 'resuscitate some of its old breath' and as an adjective to 'name those acts of competence … that we want to defend from measurement or manipulation'.[19] Or, as he considers the loss of gratuity in modernity,

by Boniface Ramsey (New York, New City Press, 2004), p. 373.

17 Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, <www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html> [accessed 28th August 2022] Ch 2 Para 10.

18 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 216.

19 Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (New York, London, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1981), p. 57-58.

Illich makes up an entirely new word:

> Is there another word for the non-purposeful action, which is only performed because it's beautiful …In German I invented the word *Unmsonstigkeit,* for no purpose at all, and it seems to have stuck, though it's in no dictionary.[20]

With the term *conspiratio*, Illich is combining his re-use of 'vernacular' with his invented '*Unmsonstigkeit*' in order to, literally, resuscitate some of the church's old breath. Furthermore, while Illich is unique in his use of *conspiratio* to refer to a Christian kissing ritual, it is apparent that, like 'vernacular', he hasn't pulled the term from a semantic vacuum. The French Jesuit priest and scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, was a scholar with whom Illich was both familiar,[21] and fond of.[22] Teilhard uses the term 'conspiration' extensively through his writing to contrast the 'enforced mechanization of human energies'[23] with an:

> 'entirely new form of connection that distinguishes the human layer from all other departments of earthly life, [and] is the aptitude of different consciousnesses, taken in a group, to unite (by language and countless other, more obscure links) so as to constitute a single All'.[24]

As David H. Lane notes, Teilhard uses the term '*conspiration*' to refer to what he believed to be an inevitable future

20 Cayley, Rivers, p. 227.

21 Hoinacki & Mitcham, *Challenges*, p. 44.

22 Francisco Bravo, *Christ in the Thought of Teilhard De Chardin*, trans. by Cathryn B. Larme (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. v.

23 Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Future of Man,* trans. by Norman Denny (London, Collins, 1965), p. 54.

24 Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Vision of the Past*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (London, Collins, 1966), p. 60.

cohering of humanity in love and peace.[25] Additionally, Jean Daniélou, the Jesuit priest and patristic scholar with whom Illich was also familiar,[26] similarly identifies the eschatological scope of *conspiration* in the writing of Gregory of Nyssa. Here, Daniélou notes that Gregory transposes the term from its implication in medicine, where it denotes bodily harmony, and physics, where it marks 'the cohesion of the physical world,[27] towards the cohesion of the trinitarian God and to 'the eschatological union of wills in membership with Being'.[28]

Although Illich doesn't make any explicit reference to either of these writers, two possible connections can be found in his work. Firstly, since Illich was aware of the work of Teilhard and Daniélou, it is possible that he was also aware of their use and explication of the term. Given its inclusion in Vatican II and, as we will see later in the writing of David Jones,[29] 'conspiration' was a fairly well-known word at the time of Illich's writing. This is made even more likely given that Illich's near ubiquitous use of '*conspiratio*' is interrupted by a singular use of the term '*conspiration*'.[30] Considering its lack of historical use but recent revival in the writing of some of his contemporaries, this is strongly suggestive of the influence of Teilhard and Daniélou. Secondly, there are conceptual links between their sense of the harmonious cohesion of be-

25 David H. Lane, *The Phenomenon of Teilhard: Prophet for a New Age* (Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1996), p. 107-112

26 Cayley, *Rivers,* p. 54.

27 Jean Daniélou, *L'être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse,* trans. by Samuel Cardwell (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1970), p. 63.

28 Ibid, p. 74.

29 René Hague, *A Commentary on the Anathémata of David Jones* (Wellingborough, Skelton's Press, 1977), p. 26.

30 David Cayley, 'The Corruption of Christianity: Ivan Illich on Gospel, Church and Society' (2007) < https://www.davidcayley.com/transcripts> [accessed 27th August 2022] (part 3), p. 22.

ing in love, and Illich's *conspiratio* as prolonging the love of the Incarnation via the cohesion of breathing together. The claim of this essay, however, is that Illich is using the term afresh, and it will be apparent in the following sections that while *conspiration* is universal and eschatological in scope, Illich's *conspiratio* refers to a local and unique intimacy that is available in the present.

Illich's Use of the Term

Illich makes references to the *conspiratio* three times towards the end of his life; the first in a series of interviews with David Cayley later published in the book: *The Rivers North of the Future*; the following year in his address entitled 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy'; and a year later in the interviews published as the 'reiterations' in *The Rivers North of the Future*. In each instance, Illich aims to confront his readers with what he believes to be both forgotten and striking aspects of early Christian practice.

David Cayley records two references to the *conspiratio* in the first series of interviews wherein Illich claims that the practice was a central Christian ritual.

> The high point of Christian ritual and ceremony still consists in a communal meal of bread and wine, a *symposium*, but in the first centuries of Christianity there was also *conspiratio*, that is a breathing into each others' mouths.[31]

Via the *conspiratio*, Illich suggests that breathing-together formed a central aspect of early Christian practice and that the church was contingent not just on the Eucharist, but on a kiss constituted by a sharing of breath or spirit. Further, Illich alludes to its liturgical nature, where he notes that the *conspiratio* is a ritual that:

31 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 85-86.

> …does more than merely remember a faith which we already have. When we celebrate the faith by sharing bread and sharing the spirit through the kiss of peace, the *conspiratio* of which we spoke, the social entity comes into existence.[32]

Both references to a *conspiratio* place distinct emphasis on the sharing of breath, rather than the act of kissing. Both also refer to an action of the church and emphasize the activity itself against questions of its nature as a formal ritual. This suggests that Illich's aim isn't to analyze and clarify an ancient practice but to confront his audience with the intimacy and centrality of breathing-together and a mouth-to-mouth kiss in early Christian liturgy. Notably, the semantic ambiguity of *conspiratio* expands in Illich's reflections published as the 'reiterations' where he links the term more explicitly to distinct liturgical functions, and even suggests that the term was a title:

> The world was changed forever by the appearance of a community …based entirely on the contribution of each one, no matter what his rank, in the *conspiratio* of the liturgical kiss. A community was created by a somatic interchange and not by some cosmic or natural referent.[33]

> These guys got together for a celebration which had two high points, one of them called *conspiratio*.[34]

In light of these statements, it is understandable why commentators would assume Illich is discussing a formal aspect of early Christian liturgy – a primitive 'kiss of peace'. Indeed, it could be that Illich has access to sources that explicitly

32 Ibid, p. 142-143.

33 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 178.

34 Ibid, p. 216.

name this practice as a *conspiratio*. Nevertheless, in each quotation above, it is clear that Illich wants to use the *conspiratio* as a way of highlighting not only the radical nature of early Christian sociality, but also the radical form that it took with a mouth-to-mouth kiss. This purpose is brought to the fore in a series of interviews with David Cayley broadcast on his CBC radio show entitled *The Corruption of Christianity.*

In these interviews, Illich introduces the *conspiratio* as a 'strange oddity' which is foreign and 'shocking' to the modern individual.[35] Furthermore, in the second episode of the series, Cayley recollects Illich's thoughts on the *conspiratio* insofar as it contrasts 'modern ideas of political community' and the establishment of the church as a legal entity.[36] Here, Illich presents the ritual breathing-together of the church in stark antithesis to modern notions of contract. Cayley also records Illich making an explicit connection between the Incarnation and the *conspiratio*. The Incarnation, for Illich, enabled a 'new respect for the human flesh, not as social entities, but as uniquely and enfleshed persons'.[37] Consequently, the social reality of the church is constituted by enfleshed persons who feast on the Eucharist and share in the spirit through the 'mouth-to-mouth kiss'.[38] Thus, by referring to the ancient kissing ritual as a *conspiratio*, Illich isn't just highlighting a title, or a technical term, but is inviting his listeners to confront the intimacy of the liturgical Christian breathing-together and its implications for living within modernity.

35 Cayley, <https://www.davidcayley.com/transcripts> (part 2), p. 14.

36 Ibid, p. 14.

37 Cayley, <https://www.davidcayley.com/transcripts> (part 3), p. 22.

38 Ibid, p. 22.

The Cultivation of Conspiracy

A year after the interviews which constituted *The Rivers North of the Future,* and prior to the later discussions comprising the *reiterations*, Illich delivered one of his final public addresses on receiving the culture and peace prize in Bremen, later entitled 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy'.[39] Throughout this address, Illich connects the liturgical kiss and breathing-together of the early church with peace. As such, in order to further uncover the meaning and significance of the *conspiratio* in Illich's writing, one must also attend to his understanding of peace.

In this address, Illich presents a meandering and poignant account of his life that reflects upon his journey as a thinker, priest, friend, and celebrant. Here, Illich glosses distinctive aspects of his past via a myriad of synonyms such as atmosphere, spirit, aula, or mood. He lovingly refers to his friendships as a bouquet of flowers which 'varies which each breath',[40] a metaphor that is vividly imaged by the presentation of flowers by each of his friends on his birthday.[41] Illich refers to 'peace', as 'the one strong word with which the atmosphere of friendship created among equals has been appropriately named'.[42] And such peace, Illich suggests, finds its origin in the intimate breathing-together of the *conspiratio*:

> In the Christian liturgy of the first century, [kissing] assumed a new function. It became one of two high points in the celebration of the Eucharist - *conspiratio*, became a solemn liturgical gesture by which participants in the cult-action share their breath or spirit with one anoth-

39 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 233-242.

40 Ibid, p. 238.

41 Ibid, p. 233.

42 Ibid, p. 238.

> er. It came to signify their union in one Holy Spirit, the community that takes shape in God's breath. The *ecclesia* came to be through a public ritual action, the liturgy, and the soul of this liturgy was the *conspiratio*. Explicitly, corporeally, the central Christian celebration was understood as a co-breathing, a con-spiracy, the bringing about of a common atmosphere, a divine milieu.[43]

With these striking statements, Illich roots his conception of peace within the liturgy of the Christian church whose physical and spiritual body was most efficaciously signified and engendered by a liturgical kiss. As before, Illich subverts Teilhard's universal and eschatological milieu with one that is - distinctly local and always possible. Indeed, Illich's journey of discovering the significance of the *conspiratio* began in an attempt to 'dismantle any universal notion of peace' and instead make it clear that 'peace is not an abstract condition, but a very specific spirit to be relished in its particular, incommunicable uniqueness by each community'.[44]

Peace in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy'

Illich's 'peace' refers both to the atmosphere that cultivates friendship and to the atmosphere that friendship cultivates. Illich suggests that the 'climate' that fosters 'the growth of friendship',[45] is friendship *itself,* insofar as 'only persons who face one another in trust can allow its emergence'.[46] This ambiguous causality also attends to the breathing-together, the *con-spiratio,* of the church which 'is peace, understood

43 Ibid, p. 240.

44 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 239.

45 Ibid, p. 235.

46 Ibid, p. 238.

as the community that arises from it'.[47] Peace, in this sense is both a noun and a verb, it denotes an atmosphere and the act which generates it.

Additionally, for Illich, this peace is personal to the point of being 'frail and often discounted' and he likens it to 'the air that weaves and wafts and evokes memories, like those attached to the Burgundy long after the bottle has been opened'.[48] With this analogy, Illich clarifies peace as that which lingers as an atmospheric trace of friendship while also enabling a type of *anamnesis* as it makes those memories present once again. With this analogy, Illich also highlights the corporeality of a peaceful atmosphere wherein, to 'savor the feel of a place' Illich says, 'you trust your nose; to trust another, you must first smell him'.[49] Therefore, just as peace cannot be abstracted from the concrete realities of a local community, spirit cannot be abstracted from the smell of someone's breath. Notably, it is this very particularity that makes peace 'fragile' to efforts to guarantee its appearance. As he discusses the peace of the *conspiratio,* Illich traces how the intimate and sensual kiss became institutionalized, 'sanitized' and mediated by an 'instrument' called the pax-board. The pax-board, Illich notes, was an instrument developed and used between the 13th and 15th centuries which the priest would kiss and hand around the congregation to be kissed.[50] Thus, while Illich identifies the *conspiratio* with peace *itself*, he also narrates the history of the practice as it becomes camouflaged by a utilitarian '*pax*',[51] is evacuated of its carnal dimension and gratuitousness, and is corrupted into an unprecedented cultural commitment to contract.

47 Ibid, p. 241.

48 Ibid, p. 237.

49 Ibid, p. 237.

50 Cayley, Rivers, p. 217.

51 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 239.

Another key area of Illich's peace explored in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy' is its implication in temporal peace and in the peace of the Incarnation. The first realm of peace that Illich alludes to in this address is 'the people's peace'. Illich uses this phrase in a lecture given to the Peace Research Association in Japan entitled 'The De-Linking of Peace and Development'.[52] In this lecture, Illich explicates a peacefulness that is mysterious, intimate and is essentially embedded within the freedom of subsistent cultures. 'Each people's peace', Illich says, is as 'distinct as each people's poetry'.[53] Throughout this lecture, Illich contrasts this notion of local peace to modern development and to a *pax* which 'has now lost the boundaries of its meaning'.[54] The 'people's peace', for Illich, is violently pacified by development and economic uniformity. Illich's peace, therefore, is neither the absence of war, nor is it dependent on war, rather it is the 'condition under which each culture flowers in its own incomparable way'.[55]

One of Illich's key accomplishments in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy' is to go beyond his de-linking the people's peace from development and to link it to what I call 'the Incarnation's peace'. In so doing, Illich clarifies the intrinsic connection between these realms while also highlighting their radical difference. The peace that is the result of 'a deliberate, mutual, somatic and gratuitous gift to one another',[56] starkly contrasts the 'cultivated distrust', of early Western civic culture. [57] With the *conspiratio,* therefore, Illich isn't only aiming to highlight an aspect of early Christian sociality that starkly

52 Ivan Illich, 'De-Linking Peace and Development', p. 16-26.

53 Ibid, p. 15.

54 Ibid, p. 17.

55 Ibid, p. 17.

56 Ibid, p. 241.

57 Ibid, p. 237.

contrasts his own, but also the surprising revelation of the Incarnation that dwelled within and transformed the 'people's peace'. Lastly, in this address, the *conspiratio* also provides an example for Illich to trace the corruption of Christianity into modernity as he argues that *modern peace*, for better or for worse, originated in the *conspiratio*. Therefore, in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', Illich briefly alludes to a peace that is coincident with the activity of a subsistent community, is radically altered by the Incarnation, continues in the *conspiratio*, and declines into modernity.

The *Conspiratio,* Ritual Kissing and the Kiss of Peace

It has been demonstrated that Illich's primary aim in discussing the *conspiratio* is to highlight the surprising social reality of the early Christians., However, this essay will argue that Illich's *conspiratio* cannot be identified strictly with early Christian ritual kissing, which was multivalent, nor with the kiss of peace, which was only linked to the eucharistic meal as church liturgy developed from the 2nd century and especially the 3rd and 4th centuries onwards. Conversely, and despite the ambiguous history of the *conspiratio,* I will argue that Illich's insights are still historically substantial and richly capture the reality of a church that expressed its sociality with a kiss.

Early Ritual Kissing

In his book *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church,* Michael Phillip Penn narrates the unfolding of Christian ritual kissing in the life of the first five centuries of the church**.** His aim in the book is to explicate how 'the ritual kiss became an important tool in the formation and manipulation of early Christian identity'.[58] By adopt-

58 Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 121.

ing Catherine Bell's notion of a ritual as an 'insistence on distinguishing its actions from that of nonritual activities',[59] Penn first aims to close up the supposed 'vast chasm' of Christian rituals and 'everyday gestures',[60] while also highlighting the distinguishing features of Christian kissing, such as his discovery that 'there are no non-Christian references to a widely exchanged ritual kiss'.[61]

One of the most prominent historical allusions that Illich makes about the *conspiratio* is that it was a practice shared by Christians in the earliest centuries.[62] While Illich's historical claims in this respect are implicit and ambiguous, Penn only furthers Illich's ambiguity by highlighting the extreme difficulty of making any concrete claims about the kissing practices of the earliest Christians. Indeed, Penn is at pains to highlight the 'dearth of source material' regarding the practice of the ritual kiss in the first decades of the church's life. According to Penn, the biblical references to a 'holy kiss' or to the 'kiss of love',[63] represent the only allusions to the kiss before Justin's *First Apology* written between 155-157AD.[64] Nevertheless, while explicit references to the practice are extremely limited, when understood alongside aspects of broader kissing practices and related theological themes, these references can provide some significant insights into the Christian ritual kiss. To this end, Edward Phillips conducts an excellent study of the biblical references to a ritual kiss where he aims to clarify its possible pneumatological connotations. For example, Phillips notes that the kiss being called 'holy' indicates that its

59 Ibid, p. 35.

60 Ibid, p. 105, 17.

61 Ibid, p. 150.

62 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 216.

63 See Romans 16:16, I Thessalonians 5:26, I Corinthians 16:20, II Corinthians 13:12, I Peter 5:14

64 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 18-21.

meaning may be found 'within [Paul's] pneumatology',[65] and as such, suggests that to share in the kiss is to 'share in the life of Christ' himself.[66] Indeed, Penn himself concedes it reasonable 'that the combination of early Christian's desire to share each other's spirit …may have helped motivate the creation of the Christian ritual kiss'.[67] Further to the pneumatological aspects, Penn and Phillips note the strong connotations of the kiss to Christians' sense of creating a radical kinship.[68] Penn, for example, notes a unique aspect of the Christian kiss with there being 'no non-Christian references to a widely exchanged ritual kiss'.[69] Additionally, Nicolas James Perella also highlights the sensual significance of the act and suggests that 'without doubt the senses that are brought into active play during the kiss point to a connection with eating'.[70]

The phenomenological and pneumatological conceptions which orbit around the kissing ritual are both ambiguous and conjectural. However, they do suggest that the earliest Christian kissing rituals carried an abundance of meaning and were intertwined with their sense of being the body of Christ. Illich's claims that the kiss 'came to signify their union in one Holy Spirit' and that 'the *ecclesia* came to be through a public ritual action' therefore, insightfully capture what is a unique aspect of the early church and its ritual kissing.

While Illich's understanding of '*conspiratio*' is cogent with this abundantly meaningful kissing ritual, his historical claims are more tenuous. For example, Illich suggests

65 Edward L. Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge, Grove Books Limited, 1996), p. 8.

66 Ibid, p. 12.

67 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 20.

68 Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss*, p. 36, Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 21.

69 Ibid, p. 150.

70 Nicolas James Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane* (California, University of California Press, 1969), p. 1.

that the *conspiratio* was a distinct embrace that both preceded the communion,[71] and functioned as one of two 'high-points' within the 'very first Christian centuries'.[72] While it has already been shown that this claim cannot be substantiated due to the lack of written material, it is also possible that in the earliest practices of the church the kiss wasn't its primary spiritual encounter. In his book *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Dennis E. Smith seeks to root the early Christian community meals within 'the larger phenomenon of the banquet as a social institution'.[73] Here, Smith argues that Christians 'utilized the banquet institution with its rich symbolism and adapted it according to their own needs and emphases'.[74] The natural form of entertainment adapted from the *symposium*, which occurred after the meal, would be 'communal worship'.[75] Smith notes that this time of worship had distinctly spiritual aspects and aligns with Paul's discussions on spiritual worship as it follows his teaching on eating practices in I Corinthians 11-14.[76] Smith's research troubles Illich's claim that the kiss represented the spiritual 'high point' that preceded the communion in the early church's liturgy. Instead, according to Smith, the spiritual high point followed the common meal and was unrelated to the kissing ritual which would have been most commonly offered as a greeting. Nevertheless, Smith's work does provide some substance to Illich's claim that a liturgical high point in the earliest Christian

71 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 240.

72 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 216.

73 Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002), p. 20.

74 Ibid, p. 174.

75 Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, p. 179.

76 Ibid, p. 187.

worship was constituted by spiritual exchange and related intimately to a common meal.

Further to this critique of Illich's historical claims, Penn's analysis of the increasing references to ritual kissing from the 2nd century onwards gesture toward a multivalent practice that occurred outside of the formal liturgical gatherings of the church as much as it did within them. According to Penn, after the biblical references the earliest reference is made by Justin Martyr, where the kiss follows the common prayer and precedes the Eucharist.[77] Similarly, while referring to the ritual kiss as a kiss of peace, Tertullian understands it as relating directly to the prayers as their 'completion'.[78] Other 2nd century sources describe a kiss of greeting such as in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla,* where Thecla kisses the fetters imprisoning Paul.[79] Penn highlights the kiss' presence in increasingly liturgical contexts within the third and fourth centuries where Origen is the first to 'directly link the ritual kiss with the Eucharist'.[80] He notes that various sources in these centuries 'speak of the ritual kiss in a variety of contexts: as part of prayer, Eucharist, baptism, ordination, penitence, martyrdom, and epistolary salutations'.[81] Thus, the multivalence of the kiss in the early centuries of the church highlights how ritual kissing exceeds Illich's conception of the *conspiratio* as a definitive ritual performed in connection to the Eucharist.

77 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 22.

78 Tertullian, De Oratione 18 (PL 1:1282) cited in Foley, Michael P. 'The Whence and Wither of the Kiss of Peace in the Roman Rite', *Antiphon* 14/1 (2010), p. 50.

79 Penn, *Kissing Christians,* p. 22.

80 Ibid, p. 23.

81 Ibid, p. 23.

The Later Kiss of Peace

Moving into the Middle Ages, Michael P. Foley explores how the ritual kiss developed as a liturgical kiss of peace in his article 'The Whence and Whither of the Kiss of Peace in the Roman Rite'. In contrast to Illich, Foley ties the kiss of peace to the peace of the risen Christ, while abstracting it from its concrete context in temporality. Further to Penn, it is apparent that this liturgical development continues to refine the theological significance of the kiss while evacuating it of phenomenological intimacy. One core aspect of Illich's conception of the kiss is his identifying peace with kissing itself, while being wary of its opposite conflation where the kiss is 'camouflaged' by the *pax,*[82] which, for Illich, is invariably linked to the violence and domination of *Pax Romana.* Therefore, in contrast to Illich, who ties 'peace' to the concrete and mysterious reality of the *conspiratio*, Foley conflates the kiss with notions of *pax* and with a theological conception of the peace of the risen Christ.

Foley's abstracting the kiss of peace from its initial and laudable 'substantial realism'[83] is realised in his primary aim to advise that, inspite of its multivalent significances, the Roman Rite focusis on one specific meaning. In support of this argument, Foley narrates how the kiss gradually became hierarchically distributed and shifted from an initial egalitarian sharing of the peace to the 'Twelfth-century manuals [that] show the celebrant FIRST kissing the altar …[who] would then pass the peace on to the deacon, who in turn passed it on to the lesser ministers and the congregation'.[84] Coincident with this 'gradual shift in the kiss' administration',[85] Foley also

82 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 239-241.

83 Foley, Kiss of Peace, p. 52.

84 Ibid, p. 63.

85 Ibid, p. 62.

notes how the kiss' placement within the liturgy further refined the practice from a gesture of peace itself to a theological concept of peace: 'the distinctive ordering of the *pax* in the Roman Mass set the conditions for a distinctive theological appropriation of the patristic heritage in the western Church'.[86] Consequently, Foley interprets the kiss of peace in the 10th and 11th century in the following manner:

> Simply put, if the kiss in the Eastern rites is a conciliatory kiss with pneumatological and paschal corollaries, the kiss in the Roman Rite is a pneumatological and paschal kiss with conciliatory corollaries.[87]

Despite Foley's reference to its decline in the 1200s,[88] and in contrast to his referencing its lively liturgical function alongside its secular counterpart, the historian John Bossy provides further insight into the practice of the kiss outside of the liturgy where it retains both theological significance and a certain gratuitousness that the liturgical kiss of peace did not. In his survey of the Christian West between 1400-1700, Bossy affords some excellent insights into the kiss' implication in fraternities which offered Christian solidarity as an object of free choice ,[89] and were often entered into via a ritual kiss.[90] These fraternities celebrated occasional feastings, reminiscent of the ancient love feast and whose peacefulness, Bossy notes, 'equalled friendship …not peace the opposite of war'.[91] Such practices contrast, for Bossy, kissing practices within the church, where congregants would 'try not to quarrel about

86 Foley, Kiss of Peace, p. 64.

87 Ibid, p. 67.

88 Ibid, p. 70.

89 John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 58.

90 Ibid, p. 59.

91 Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, p. 59

who would kiss [the pax-board] first'.[92] Like both Penn and Illich, Foley offers a narrative of the phenomenological decline and instrumentalizing of the kiss. Each writer tells of a ritual that began in a substantive intimacy and ambiguity and developed into a hierarchically distributed and instrumental exchange. While Foley believes that these later practices often continued to 'evince the rich scriptural, patristic, and medieval traditions from which it was derived',[93] Illich, in contrast, lamented the decline of the essential intimacy that sharing the kiss first demanded. Here, Foley's effort to limit the meaning of the kiss to a theological conception of peace contrasts with Illich's understanding of a *conspiratio* which shares both in the multivalent particularity of temporality and in the peace of the Incarnation.

Therefore, in contrast to Foley who argues that the kiss of peace should signify Christ's peace in the Roman rite at the expense of temporal peace, Illich's *conspiratio* gathers up temporal peace into the perfection of Christ via the Incarnation. Indeed, as Catherine Pickstock intimates in *The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy,* in the Middle Ages, 'there was simply no duality of the liturgical and the mundane[94] such that the peace of Christ, 'could be incarnated in all particular, even "extra-ecclesial" activities'.[95] Peacefulness in this respect, and in the fraternities referenced by Bossy, 'was characterized by a state of being attained through repeated affirmations of ecstatic collectivity'.[96] Therefore, despite Illich's tenuous historical claims about the ritual kiss, in contrast to the scholarly analyses of Penn and Foley, it may be suggested that he more

92 Ibid, p. 69.

93 Ibid, p. 71.

94 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1998), p. 146.

95 Ibid, p. 147.

96 Ibid, p. 146.

adequately reveals its gratuitousness and intimacy, even as they decline with its continuing liturgical development.

The *Conspiratio* is a Kiss of Peace

The above section clarified Illich's *conspiratio* in the context of early Christian ritual kissing and a later more theologically refined kiss of peace. Having argued that Illich's *conspiratio* is not a historical technical term, I now demonstrate that the term may still refer to a kiss of peace, insofar as it is understood in light of Illich's conceptions of peace. This will be achieved by dividing Illich's thought into the distinct realms of 'the people's peace' and the 'Incarnation's peace'. This section will conclude by discussing how the *conspiratio* prolongs the Incarnation's peace and represents a distinct and surprising theological turn in his writing and work.

The People's Peace

As previously mentioned, the 'people's peace' is a phrase used in Illich's address, 'The De-Linking of Peace and Development'.[97] This lecture functions as a useful guide to the meaning of the people's peace as it is present throughout Illich's work and summarized by his stated thesis:

> …under the cover of 'development,' a worldwide war has been waged against the people's peace. …I believe that limits to economic development, originating at the grass roots, are the principal condition for people to recover their peace.[98]

Here, Illich contrasts peace not against war, but with the violence of modern development. This violence, for Illich, shares in the tendency of war to make cultures alike as it

97 Illich, 'De-Linking Peace and Development', p. 15.

98 Ibid, p. 16.

dis-integrates subsistence-oriented cultures into an economic system.[99] 'Development', for Illich, represents the prime form of violence against local patterns of reciprocity and exchange. It is responsible for eradicating the freedom that constitutes a peaceful condition, both by its capitalizing on the 'utilization values' of the environment and consequent failure to respect its gratuity and the manner in which it is used by subsistent living.

One of the primary means by which Illich aims to establish the condition of peace is by exposing and delineating the reach of development, the modern economy, and its institutions. These aims motivate one of his most well-known works, *Tools for Conviviality.* In this tract, Illich discusses a notion of freedom that doesn't just denote the capacity to choose but also gestures towards a broader anthropological category: a freedom to be human. Such freedom denotes an individual's capability to creatively use their energies for the sake of personal and communal flourishing and Illich laments how this capacity to act freely has been lost due to the hegemony of modern institutions and monopolizing tools.[100] This modern institutional state where individuals are defined more by their consumption than their creativity contrasts the realization of human freedom within a personal interdependence that Illich calls 'conviviality':

> A convivial society should be designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others. People feel joy, as opposed to mere pleasure, to the extent that their activities are creative; while the growth of tools beyond a certain point increases regimentation, dependence, exploitation, and impotence.'[101]

99 Ibid, p. 21.

100 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 53.

101 Illich, Tools, p. 20.

For Illich, human freedom can only be truly realized within personal interdependence,[102] and therefore by placing limitations on tools.

The dynamic interplay between freedom and limitation that characterizes conviviality is coterminous with what Illich terms the 'vernacular domain': a notion that he develops in both *Shadow Work* and *Gender* to delineate a space that exists in distinction and apart from the 'limitless' economic and institutional sphere. It is a space where individual sovereignty is violated by professional services. He deftly and insightfully summarizes this violation by remarking that 'the siren of one ambulance can destroy Samaritan attitudes in a whole town'.[103] This concept of the vernacular, as Cayley notes, is rooted in the Latin *vernaculum*, which doesn't just refer to local language, but denotes whatever was 'homemade as opposed to what was commercially exchanged'.[104] By defining a 'vernacular' space, Illich aims to recover both the creative capacities of human beings and to resist the capitulation of subsistence and freedom to modernity's developmental ends. With conviviality and the vernacular, Illich alludes to a realm where individuals and communities flourish according to their own freedoms in a 'tender complexity' where 'each vernacular architecture is as unique as vernacular speech'.[105]

Crucially, Illich recognizes that the destruction of peace, perpetuated by development and institutionalism, is not a violent 'other' but is instead its corrupted antithesis. Illich first alludes to this observation in 'The Rebirth of Epimethean Man' where he claims that 'the history of modern man

102 Ibid, p. 11.

103 Ivan Illich, *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis – The Expropriation of Health* (New York, Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 1982), p. 16.

104 Cayley, *Intellectual Journey*, p. 182.

105 Ivan Illich, 'Dwelling' in *In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses 1978-1990*, ed. By Valentina Borremans (London, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1992), p. 55-56.

begins with the degradation of Pandora's myth'.[106] He develops this notion most fully two decades later in *The Rivers North of the Future,* by explicating the thesis that modernity is a mutation of Christianity and that the Incarnation represented 'the beginning of the end' of - people's peace. In defence of this thesis, Illich draws upon all of the major aspects of his work, such as healthcare, schooling, embodiment, freedom, and the senses. Like in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy' and 'The De-linking of Peace and Development', Illich articulates a peacefulness that is coterminous with a Plato's *philia* that was the 'flowering of civic virtue and its crown'.[107] Illich also finds such peace within pre-modern schooling and healthcare where a student is not educated, but freely learns;[108] and a patient is not diagnosed, but freely volunteers 'his stance within himself'.[109] For Illich, the freedom inherent in peacefulness is further realized within sensual participation with the world wherein he notes that 'seeing was once felt to be an act of bodily intercourse with the object of my gaze'.[110] Illich's notions of a pre-modern goodness, fitted-ness and proportionality, are all constitutive of the people's peace, and he contends that each are lost to the violence of modern values, systems, and utility.[111]

This brief survey highlights that one of Illich's primary purposes in his work is to articulate and recover the people's peace – especially as he endeavours to resist its loss in modernity. Indeed, Illich's work on 'the people's peace' inspires most of the later commentary on and application of his work.

106 Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (New York, Harper & Row, 1971), p. 103.

107 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 147.

108 Illich, *Deschooling Society*, p. xix.

109 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 127.

110 Ibid, p. 107.

111 Ibid, p. 132-138.

However, as discussed by Illich in *The Rivers North of the Future,* this purpose does not constitute the entirety of his aim as a writer and speaker. Rather, the people's peace is complemented by something altogether more beautiful *and* sinister. Illich traces the destruction of the people's peace to its very perfection in the Incarnation. While Illich doesn't expressly state a conception of the Incarnation's peace, the following section will demonstrate that his discussion of the Incarnation represents a crucial turn in his understanding of the people's peace, its history and its recovery.

The Incarnation's Peace

In his 'testament' as documented in *The Rivers North of the Future*, Illich regards the Incarnation as the prime locus for the loss of the people's peace in modernity. The Incarnation, for Illich, functions as the origin of the sin which destroys the people's peace, so much so that he reluctantly confesses his temptation to 'curse' it.[112] It represents 'the beginning of the end',[113] revealing both a new possibility of love and a new possibility of sin. The revelation of this newness, therefore, has a distinct relation to the people's peace. The following section will argue that the Incarnation both deepens and disrupts the people's peace and, though not inevitably, comes to threaten its very existence.

> Illich begins this 'testament' by stating:
> I believe that the Incarnation makes possible an entirely new flowering of love and knowledge. For Christians, the Biblical God can now be loved in the flesh. …A new dimension of love has opened, but this opening is highly ambiguous because of the way in which it

112 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 61.

113 Ibid, p. 175.

> explodes certain universal assumptions about the conditions under which love are possible.[114]

Here, Illich articulates the radical newness of the Incarnation. Just as the *conspiratio* refers to an actual breathing-together and just as the people's peace is coincident with the particularities of a local culture, the peace of the Incarnation *is* the face-to-face encounter with the God who may be seen, touched, heard, and smelled. Illich images this conception of the Incarnation most thoroughly in his recollection of the encounter of the Good Samaritan with the beaten-up Jew. With this biblical story, Illich aims to work out the implications of the Incarnation wherein the Samaritan 'commits a kind of treason by caring for his enemy',[115] and establishes a relationship which is 'arbitrary from everybody else's point of view'.[116] Its hidden perfection, Cayley notes, 'contains an intimate and incommunicable depth that must necessarily remain shaded from other eyes'.[117] The Incarnation opens up, for Illich, a 'new dimension of love' and a 'realm of gratuity',[118] a peaceful space.

This 'newness' can be explicated via two interrelated movements; Illich's Incarnation both *disrupts* and *deepens* the people's peace. One primary instance of the people's peace which Illich works to recover is 'friendship'. Illich notes that an aspect of premodern (and indeed modern) friendship is its '[arising] from a place and the practices appropriate to it'.[119] For example, A.C. Grayling notes how, for Aristotle, friend-

114 Ibid, p. 47.

115 Ibid, p. 51.

116 Ibid, p. 177.

117 David Cayley, 'Christ and Anti-Christ in the Thought of Ivan Illich' (2015) <www.davidcayley.com/blog/2015/10/22/christ-and-anti-christ-in-the-thought-of-ivan-illich?rq=shaded> [accessed 28th August 2022], (para 9 of 16)

118 Cayley, *Rivers,* p. 49.

119 Ibid, p. 147.

ship cannot be realized by many, because many lack the degree of virtue required to be a friend.[120] Conversely, Illich contends that this notion of friendship as the fruit of virtue or likeness, is dramatically inverted by the Incarnation to being a gratuitous 'source, condition, and context for the possible coming about of commitment and like-mindedness'.[121] While friendship may be understood as being contingent on certain affinities, Illich suggests that the Incarnation instead '[disrupts] the frame that limited the conditions under which friendship could appear'.[122] Consequently, the peace of friendship made possible by the Incarnation is infinitely more unique than a culture's peace as it may arise from an encounter with *any* other. The Incarnation deepens friendship to the gratuitous encounter of any *one* with any *other* and facilitates their faithful bearing with the other's 'impossible way of being'.[123]

This movement of disruption and deepening may also be found in Illich's account of 'proportionality' where things in the world are 'complementary and mutually constitutive',[124] and the good is constituted by the capacity for things to 'fit'.[125] Against Cayley's suggestion that the Incarnation destroys proportionality, Illich argues that it deepens it:

> The call of charity *agape*, which the Samaritan hears, does not destroy proportionality but rather elevates it to a level which formerly was not perceived …It says that your *telos,* your end purpose, the goal of your being, is in an other whom you freely choose.[126]

120 A.C. Grayling, *Friendship* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013), p. 34.

121 Cayley, *Rivers,* p. 147.

122 Ibid, p. 147.

123 Ibid, p. 152.

124 Ibid, p. 132.

125 Ibid, p. 134.

126 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 197.

Notably, the deepening of proportionality and coincident perfecting of creation is dependent on it first being disrupted. The Samaritan must first step outside the boundaries of his ethnos to lovingly face the beaten-up Jew,[127] just as the Christ who became human also did, as one who, Kierkegaard states, is 'heterogeneous from first to last'.[128] According to Illich, the Incarnation can only fully enter into the infinitely varied particularity of human life if it is also thoroughly *unlimited*. As Charles Taylor comments: 'This shakes up the cosmos and the proportionalities which are established in it …but it does not deny proportionality. It creates a new kind of fittingness, belonging together'.[129]

This both validates and contrasts the ideas of the philosopher Alain Badiou who notes that Christianity is only universally relevant to all people because it arises from a nothingness and is deprived 'of an established place …is necessarily generic [and] indiscernible, indifferent, the stuff of a radically egalitarian homogeneity'.[130] That is, for Badiou, the universality of Christianity is contingent on the proclaimed 'nondifference between Jew and Greek'.[131] Similarly, for Illich, the Incarnation opens up the limits of locality towards a universal possibility of radical new relationship and, like Badiou, he argues that the Incarnation undoes cosmic totality as it reorients creation to the divine. In contrast to Badiou, however, Illich argues that a universal gospel can *only* be fulfilled within the particular – as its *telos* can only be another per-

127 Ibid, p. 50.

128 Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans by. Walter Lowrie (London Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 170.

129 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) p. 739.

130 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003) p. xvii.

131 Ibid, p. 56.

son.[132] The universal gospel, for Illich, leads to the establishing of new places and generates new particularities. The universally applicable Incarnation, for Illich, must dwell *within* the particular and thus resist any tendency to abstract its peace to theological concepts, academic arguments, or in Badiou's case, generic proclamations. Indeed, it is essentially particular, the Incarnation *is* the face-to-face encounter and not an abstract theological principle.

Like the Samaritan, this movement is imaged in the Christian practice of kissing in the earliest centuries. Here Christian kissing thoroughly threatened the sign's intimate connection to familial relations, while also signifying an altogether deeper, more universal, and more particular type of kinship – the *ecclesia*. The Incarnation *disrupts* peace – 'do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth …but a sword' (Matt 10:34) – but also *deepens* it – 'and everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.' (Matt 19:29)

Nevertheless, we cannot overlook that Illich's tale of disruption and deepening does not only narrate the revelation of a new love, but also the possibility of a betrayal that destroys the people's peace. The radical peace of the Incarnation ushered in the possibility of a 'denial, infidelity, turning away …sin'.[133] The 'best' which is the gratuitous love of the Incarnation, was corrupted into the 'worst' which is legislated love. Illich draws on the full breadth of his previous work to develop his thesis of 'the corruption of the best is the worst' in *The Rivers North of the Future* as he implicates the utilitarian tools of healthcare and schooling into the need to guarantee what could only be accomplished by the free turning in love

132 Cayley, *Rivers,* p. 197.

133 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 52.

to another. Illich believes that the people's peace is destroyed when love is evacuated of personal freedom and instead animates the purpose of an institution that seeks to love by any means necessary. For Illich, this 'worst', legislated love, represents the beginning of this principle or gesture to the meaningless universal, to expansion of systems and dismantling of the vernacular. Crucially, therefore, Illich sees the Incarnation as the genesis and revelation of the modern destruction of the people's peace. However, it is crucial to note that while the Incarnation only *disrupts and deepens* the people's peace, it also ushers in the possibility that it may be *destroyed* by institutions that seek to guarantee it.

The *Conspiratio* Prolongs the Incarnation's Peace

Illich's *conspiratio* relates intimately to the disruption and deepening of the Incarnation. In the 'reiterations', he recollects the new form of relating made possible by the Incarnation as it is exemplified by the Good Samaritan's capacity to create a relationship with the beaten-up Jew. This creative act, of freely establishing a relationship with an other, is an act which Illich says, 'prolongs the Incarnation'.[134] Notably, this phrase accompanies his contention with labels such as postmodernism and post-Christendom which, for Illich, fail to comprehend the Incarnation's significance for the nature of time and reality. Illich instead labels the time after Christ as 'apocalyptic',[135] by which he isn't intending to evoke a sense of disaster, but instead an 'unveiling' or revelation. Crucially, therefore, Illich contends that any discussion about living within modernity must take place in light of the Incarnation's unveiling new possibilities of love and revealing a new form

134 Ibid, p. 207.

135 Ibid, p. 179.

of sin as an 'indifference to what has been revealed'.[136] For example, as he confesses in an interview with David Cayley: 'In my opinion, Christ opened our eyes, in a unique and definite way, to the relationship between David and Ivan at this very moment'.[137] By locating modernity within a distinctly theological event, Illich suggests that the 'good' is not ultimately realized via the recovery of the people's peace, but via the prolonging of the Incarnation.

For example, Illich's movement from the people's peace to the peace of the Incarnation can be traced from his article, *The Need for a Common Roof* co-written with Valentina Borremans in 1971 to his later conceptions in *The Rivers North of the Future*. In this short tract, both Illich and Borremans purport a new politics which 'consists of the search for a community agreement on the technological profile of a common roof under which all the members of a society want to live'.[138] It calls for a 'voluntary and communitarian self-limitation' aimed at recovering the 'vernacular' in communities. It represents the quintessential perspective of Illich as he aims to cultivate the people' peace. Later in the article, Illich puts some flesh to the call by asking 'what is the maximum speed limit for the transport of people that allows the optimum use of public resources to guarantee optimum mobility to the largest majority?'[139]

Yet, Illich's efforts to recover peace in this article undergo a shift as he returns to consider the Incarnation and its prolonging in the *conspiratio*. In *The Rivers North of the Future,* Illich doesn't renounce the need to establish limits,

136 Ibid, p. 32.

137 Cayley, *Rivers,* p. 177.

138 Ivan Illich & Valentina Borremans, 'The Need for a Common Roof (the social control of technology)', trans. by Gustavo Esteva and Rebecca Gamez, *Conspiratio* (Fall 2021), p. 157.

139 Ibid, p. 159.

but instead aims to root the recovery of peaceful limits not in their establishing, but in the Incarnation. The Incarnation, for Illich, was the 'beginning of the end' of 'timeliness and spatiality and frontier'.[140] The Incarnation, for Illich, *disrupted* the peaceful union of time and space while also *deepening* them and revealing a creatureliness that lives 'in a now and forever …contingent at every moment on the creative act of God'.[141] As we have seen, this disruption and deepening also leads to the eventual unraveling of time and space as a unity, to the point where Galileo, for example, claimed to 'observe time apart from space'.[142] Here Illich provocatively suggests that an isolated sense of 'speed' in distinction from place is an artificial concept, and claims that the hope for a 21st century of 'Slow but Better Workers' is a 'millennial fantasy'.[143] For Illich, it seems like the revelation of sin and the seeming inevitability of capitalism requires one to return to the Incarnation, where, instead of aiming to recover a vernacular domain, Illich states:

> We have to engage in an asceticism which makes it possible to savour nowness and hereness, here as place, here as that which is between us, *as the kingdom is*. This is a most important task if we are to save what remains in us of the sense of meaning, of metaphor, of flesh, of touch, of gaze (emphasis added).[144]

Previously in this interview, Illich expresses this new sense of now-ness and here-ness by pointing to a world that 'was changed forever by the appearance of a community …in

140 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 180.

141 Ibid, p. 182.

142 Ibid, p. 181.

143 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 181.

144 Ibid, p. 182.

the *conspiratio* of the liturgical kiss'.[145] These interviews reveal a re-focusing of Illich from the people's peace to the Incarnation's peace. Here the *conspiratio* functions as the window *into* and prolonged reality *of* the Incarnation. It reveals a new unity between time and space, a new place and a new peaceful way of concretely *being* together. And Illich's kingdom is the prolonged Incarnation – as he suggests elsewhere, 'it is a social reality at a transcendental level'.[146] Its form is a celebration, using bread and wine – to remember the final blessing and eating of the God who was made flesh.

Illich's friend, Carl Mitcham, insightfully highlights how Illich's *conspiratio* reveals 'the trajectory of his thinking …[where he] suggested that a very incarnated, flesh-based breathing together is the real root of any convivial community that might become the effective arbiter of its tools'.[147] But this essay compels further commentary: historically, it has been shown that the *conspiratio* and associated kissing rituals were never merely carnal, but that they were also liturgical and spiritual. Additionally, a study of Illich's *conspiratio* suggests that the *conspiratio* is not only the root of the people's peace, but also its *uprooting*. As narrated by Illich, it prolongs the beginning of the slow tumble into modern instrumentality, while also revealing the futility of peace projects such as 'slow but better workers'. But perhaps most importantly, for Illich, it also revealed the perpetual possibility that incarnational peace may dawn as a surprise. Illich's *conspiratio*, therefore is not only 'a flesh-based breathing together' but it is also 'in the strictest sense, non-worldly, in spite of its somatic, bodily depth'.[148]

145 Ibid, p. 178.

146 Illich, *Powerless Church*, p. 87.

147 Carl Mitcham, 'The Challenges of This Collection' in *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection*, p. 13.

148 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 218.

Thinking After Ivan Illich and Prolonging the *Conspiratio*

Illich is not alone in his use of language and images like conspiracy and kissing to refer to early Christian sociality and peace. He is complemented by the poet, artist, and essayist David Jones who Rowan Williams says gives 'the best account in English this century of sacramental theology'. [149] Both Illich and Jones narrate the history of an increasingly utilitarian culture, both regard '*corruptio optimi quae est pessima*' as their muse of modernity's significance,[150] and both are steeped in – but not dominated by – the Roman Catholic tradition. A short reflection on the writing of Jones will provide further insight into two areas of Illich's *conspiratio* in need of further development. The first concerns the term itself: with Jones, it will be suggested that Illich's use of *conspiratio* is itself a conspirational act and that he seeks to unite time and space in its use. The second concerns the relation of a *conspiratio* to its corrupted antithesis – with Jones, I suggest that the term elucidates a peaceful act that resists temptation to utility.

David Jones' Sacrament: A Showing Forth in Little Space

Writing in 1960, Jones writes how the 'compact and concise words' of the first Preface, 'show forth "in little space" …the wide implications of a religion which is explicitly dependent upon small, intimate, enclosed, known and dear creaturely signs'.[151] This understanding of a sacramental showing forth 'in little space' is tied to Jones' affinity for Celtic religion and art which is 'intricate, complex, flexible, exact, and abstract'.[152] This sense of a sacramental 'showing

149 Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 2000), p. 199.

150 See. Cayley, *Rivers*, 29 and Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 182.

151 David Jones, *The Dying Gaul: And Other Writings*, ed. by Harman Grisewood (London, Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 173.

152 Jones, *The Dying Gaul*, p. 58.

forth in little space' is implicit throughout *The Anathémata* where Jones recalls the peripheries of Celtic history and twines it with the axiomatic movements of the gospel in beautiful knots of poetry and informative prose.

Towards the beginning of *The Anathémata*, Jones refers to the last supper of Jesus with his disciples as a 'conspiracy' and in so doing evokes an abundance of meaning:

> where few are, gathered in high-room
> and one, gone out.
>
> There's conspiracy here:
> Here is birthday and anniversary, if there's continuity
> Here, there's a new beginning.[153]

Jones' reference to 'conspiracy' represents one such instance where a breadth of meaning is knotted within a small space. Indeed, Jones, '[abhors] any lopping's off of meanings or emptying out …any loss of recession and thickness through'.[154] The same is true for *conspiracy* as René Hague comments on Jones' use of the term by which he:

> artfully combines *conspiratio,* conspiration, breathing together, concord (in the sense in which Teilhard is fond of using it), which may be applied to those gathered, all of one mind, to celebrate the Pasch, with the conspiracy or plot of Judas.[155]

Jones' 'conspiracy' is an abundantly meaningful term by which he juxtaposes and fits together the hidden concord and love of the disciples in the upper room, with Teilhard's final universal love, with the conspiring of Judas, with the peaceful

153 Jones, *The Anathémata*, p. 51.

154 Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, p. 120.

155 Hague, *The Anathémata of David Jones*, p. 26.

conspiring of the disciples against Roman *pax*, together with his own conspiring against the utilitarian projects of his contemporary milieu.

Further, in this small portion of this epic poem, Jones also evokes the aspect of sacramentality which gathers up time into a 'little space' and where 'conspiracy', as Hague notes, is suggestive of this sharing between times as 'there is also "conspiracy" ...between "now" and "then"'.[156] By glossing the gathering of the disciples as a conspiracy, Jones seems to be inviting the reader to peer into the upper room, like he did the 'dim lit byre',[157] while also 'forging links'[158] to its past in Judaic tradition, to its future in our contemporary context, and to our own warring against the sacramental and the gratuitous.

As with Jones' 'conspiracy', Illich's *conspiratio* can also be understood as a showing forth of abundance in little space. Concerning his use of the term itself, it is apparent that Illich similarly re-applies the term to highlight the abundance of meaning that is latent in pre-modern experiences of the body and sociality, together with them being wholly affected by the Incarnation and *Pneuma*. Illich's *conspiratio*, therefore, represents a similarly Celtic showing forth of the mystery and newness of the Incarnation as it also dwells in a broader complex of people's peace and their associated histories of ritual and gesture. Additionally, further to Jones' allusion to the 'conspiracy' between past and present, Illich's *conspiratio* also gathers up time into the little space of a kiss. It tips the *ecclesia* into an eternal 'forever' insofar as it also signifies a supreme 'nowness'.[159] In contrast to Teilhard's eschatological *conspiration*, both Jones and Illich, by way of a 'conspiracy', reach

156 Ibid, p. 25.

157 Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 248-249.

158 Powell, *Becoming Beauty*, p. 62.

159 Cayley, *Rivers,* p. 182.

back and strain forward to highlight the secret triumph of a militant church. Illich's *conspiratio* prolongs the Incarnation as an abundant sign that is intertwined with reality, a history of significances and the Divine life – just as God himself first dwelled in human flesh, cultic rites, gestures, signs, and art. Creation, for Illich, 'through the Incarnation, will perdure',[160] but not without first being changed, disrupted, and deepened.

Jones' *Efengyl*: A Peaceful resistance to utility

Published shortly before his death in 1974, Jones' poem *The Sleeping Lord* forms a part of the larger volume of short poems entitled *The Sleeping Lord: And Other Fragments*. This poem, as Dilworth notes, 'eulogizes Celtic culture',[161] and uncovers 'the antithesis between utility and gratuity'.[162] In the poem itself, Jones narrates '[the] post-Roman Celtic leader' King Arthur's sitting at table and directing defences against the 'the treason-tangle of the sub-reguli of equal privilege, the bane of the island.[163] Here, Jones brings pause to Arthur's toiled defence of the land with a knotted recollection of memorials and Oblations made by 'Athletes of God' in various wastelands and desolate places.[164] After making this *anamnesis*, he continues to further interrupt Arthur's toiled defence with the 'confused' wanderings of one 'Faustus … "of Regensium"' who makes his own *anamnesis* of the gospel:

> But anyway his main concern was with Yr Efengyl Lan and he liked to dwell on the thought that the word *efengyl* (owing, he supposed, to the kiss given at that part of

160 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 214.

161 Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p. 218.

162 Ibid, p. 218.

163 Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p. 78.

164 Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p. 79.

> the Oblation called the *pax*) could, in the tongue of his countrymen, mean a kiss. For what after all is the Hagion Evangelion if not the salutation of kiss of the eternally begotten Logos?[165]

Like his 'conspiracy' in *The Anathémata,* the peaceful kiss – *efengyl* – takes place within a liturgical interlude where the priest recalls a history of sign-making. Here the priest enfolds the gospel within a kiss, even as the kiss is itself enfolded within the broader complex of Jones' poem – it represents another example of a sign which shows forth abundant meaning in little space. While the kiss owes its significance to the conflation of the *pax* with the gospel, here Jones, in like manner to Illich, returns its significance to the salutation of Christ in the Incarnation.

While *efengyl* evokes the art of the Celts, Jones shows forth the utility of the Romans in the little space of the '*pax*'. This is made clear in his recently published poem the 'Traverse of the Wall' where Jones images, according to Tom Goldpaugh, 'imperialism at its height' with the celebration of the '*pax*':

> The signators, the sub-reguli, the delegates, the notables
> The negotiators, who with the love-cups celebrate the plan
> Pledge the pax, who with the golden style signature
> The draft, with the golden pen ratify the formula,
> Promulgate the edict of deification, pledge with the pax
> Golden cups the triumph of the Ram, & of the opulent
> Queen, the Ram's wife, who with the Ram sustains
> The megalopolis, generates death within urbs
> Throughout orbis.[166]

Jones' small allusion to the *efengyl* in the priest's pause returns Arthur's defensive peace-making to a kiss. Both Jones

165 Ibid, p. 83.

166 Tom Goldpaugh, 'On the Traverse of the Wall: The Lost Long Poem of David Jones', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 1, 19 (1994), p. 39.

and Illich, therefore, refer to the kiss of peace as a mysterious and sacramental act that facilitates one's participation in the peaceful work of Jesus Christ. Illich, for example, understands the peace of the *conspiratio* not just as the antithesis to the *pax*, but as its origin and Jones, too, regards a kiss of peace as being a means of recalling Christ within the wasteland. The Incarnation, prolonged for both Jones and Illich by a kiss, represents how development, utility and the war waged against peace are resisted and avoided. For both writers, the kiss represents a conspiracy of the Incarnation's and the people's peace, showing forth in little space the abundance of the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Illich's *conspiratio*

Like a scalpel to a wood engraving – Jones has allowed us to cut into and deepen the lines of thought that run through Illich's writing. *Conspiratio,* for Illich, is not an idea or an ideal – but an act. This final section will consider that while Illich's own re-enactment of the *conspiratio* did not prolong its specific form, a liturgical mouth-to-mouth kiss, but that he did prolong its carnal and spiritual aspects.

Illich's conspiratorial practices are latent in his work and life prior to *The Rivers North of the Future*. For example, Illich's peace, which is at once both universal and particular, is prolonged by different people in different contexts. This is intimated by Illich during an interview when he is asked if his 'free university' at Cuernavaca could be 'exported'. Visibly frustrated, Illich responds to the question by saying:

> I really think that anyone, if he were to lose that sense of inferiority produced by damned schooling, mental schooling and say, "I'm going to get some friends to-

> gether to discuss this – and – that, and I'm opening a café to do it is doing just what we do.[167]

Illich makes these remarks around the same time of those made in his essay 'How Shall We Pass on Christianity' wherein he critiques efforts to guarantee the continuance of the church through education. Alternatively, Illich commends a theological and sacramental approach to handing over tradition as he recommends that the church prolong the 'mood of the end of time …That is the mood in which the first mass was celebrated'.[168] Illich wants the church to perdure through con-celebration and commemoration, just as Cuernavaca must perdure through the free and local commitment of unique communities.

Both these accounts inform 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy' wherein he draws on the peace of the *conspiratio* to inform his own studiousness and hospitality and he highlights the early Christian *conspiratio* to confront a modern dependence on contract and to reveal the legal 'fulfilment' of love as a corruption of what the Incarnation made possible. The *conspiratio* isn't prolonged by repetition, but by participation and cultivation, and Illich's own peaceful work is an example that inspires peaceful practices in others.

Illich didn't seek to prolong the *conspiratio* with a kiss. Rather, he was, as Neto Leão beautifully identifies, his own example of a 'vanishing clergyman'.[169] His liturgical services appear to vanish into the dining room as the *conspiratio* vanished into the *convivium*. Illich prolonged the *conspiratio* by gratuitously committing to and celebrating with the other – from David Cayley to Hugh of St Victor. Therefore, while

167 Goetel, Ivan Illich: A 1972 Interview, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_ByKX-Cr9TA&t=1208s>, 21:00.

168 Illich, *Powerless Church*, p. 160.

169 Neto Leão, 'Not a Clergyman Just a Man', *Conspiratio* (Spring 2022), p. 151.

the kiss as a sign of peace has all but vanished in the contemporary church, Illich it seems, would seek to root its form in an openness to Jesus Christ as he continues to dwell, even as a 'flickering', in the present moment.[170] As Illich states in his later reflections with Cayley: 'faith in the Incarnation can flower in our time precisely because faith in God is obscured, and we are led to discover God in one another'.[171] It re-orientated his work from being preoccupied with achieving the good to gratuitously participating in goodness itself. Illich's *conspiratio* in-spires into his whole life and as such, the form of a contemporary *conspiratio* and the peace it brings should be as varied as vernacular speech - it should vary with each breath. Illich's surprising work to return peace to the Incarnation might inspire his readers and commentators to do the same and to smell, feel, and see the other as if they were Christ himself.

170 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 36.

171 Ibid, p. 176.

A Competition of Corruptions:
Mediterranean Disembedding versus Asian Nihilism

by Carl Mitcham

Corruptio optimi quae est pessima. This Latin mantra of Ivan Illich's last years may well apply to my own effort here. In trying to do my best, in homage to his life and thought, to understand and consider some implications of Illich's work, I may well be corrupting it — not to mention my own thinking. Since this is a possibility I take seriously, for any untoward results, I wish in advance to offer apologies.

My effort is to think about Ivan Illich and Buddhism. I want to let myself be stimulated by my friendship with Ivan — an experience that many of us have had, of being deeply befriended by someone we did not fully understand, whose ideas strongly influenced us, although often leading in directions he would not have endorsed. Yet his intellectual and somatic friendship — I still vividly recollect his *abrazo* and penetrating gaze, the sharing of meals and wine or tea, and conversation around a candle — challenges me to think in ways that become struggles in the search for words, insight, and fitting arguments. It is an effort to return to the memory of that friendship, to let myself imaginatively sense again his presence, assisted by others who were his friends in greater proportions than I was graced to be, and from within this palace of memory to think about a relationship that Ivan and I never discussed, except in the most allusive terms: Christianity and Buddhism. Because this is not an issue that was ever explicitly pursued, it is thus an effort to think after Illich, to see if there is something I can recover from him for my own life in a world he no longer inhabits with his long nose and lanky body, bringing forth from his absence some guiding in-

Carl Mitcham, cmitcham@mines.edu
Mitcham, C. A Competition of Corruptions: Mediterranean Disembedding versus Asian Nihilism.
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 259 - 275

timations that might still be claimed to reflect his presence. As I understand him, Illich was deeply rooted in Mediterranean Christianity.

Because of this he struggled to understand the paradoxes and contradictions with which the Christian tradition has become entangled, and developed his interpretation *corruptio optimi quae est pessima* in order to live with such entanglements. Yet, ever since the outbreak of Islamic-based terrorism — although this is an ideological term from which I wish to keep by my distance — I have increasingly struggled with Illich's interpretation. My struggle has, in turn, led me to take refuge in Buddhism, a move Illich would undoubtedly have questioned. I would nevertheless like to share, in what remains an inchoate form, this turn from Christianity to Buddhism as an alternative to Illich's interpretative strategy. At the same time, I welcome criticism from the community of Illich's friends.

Illich's History of the Christian Fall

Let me begin with a summary statement of Illich's interpretation of Christian history. Allow me to do so by quoting from Charles Taylor's expanded Gifford Lectures of 1999, published as *A Secular Age* (2007), in one of the final chapters of which he invokes Illich's analysis. According to Taylor,

> Scholars agree that the Christian church which arose in the ancient world was a new kind of religious association, that it created around itself new "service" institutions, like hospitals and hospices for the needy. It was heavily engaged in the practical works of charity. This kind of activity remained important throughout the long centuries of Christendom, until in the modern era, these institutions have been taken over by secular bodies, often by governments. Seen within the history of Western civilization,

> the present-day welfare state can be understood as the long-term heir to the early Christian church.

As a summary expression for this institutional takeover of what had been initially the activities of persons — activities given paradigmatic form by the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) — both Illich and Taylor have used the term "disembedding." As a technical term, this word can be traced back to studies in the history and sociology of economics by Karl Polanyi[1] (1944) of how markets in the 16th and 17th centuries were disinterred from the societies or cultures in which they traditionally inhered. Prior to this period, for instance, monetary transactions were hedged by numerous mores and counter mores institutions; buying and selling were generally subordinate to sharing and the cultivation of family, kinship, and ethnic ties. The creation of markets in which atomistic individuals interacted primarily based on self-interest was, for Polanyi, a wrenching development — one that Illich saw as foreshadowed by the Samaritan who befriends someone outside his own *ethnos*.

But before markets narrowed personal relationships into the pursuit of individual material self-interest, social institutions such as hospitals had been established to lighten, for Christians, the burden of extending to strangers the practices of corporeal and spiritual works of mercy previously thought appropriate only within embedded family or ethnic relationships. This too was a disembedding movement, although of a slightly different sort. Christians had been called upon to have compassion for those in need, but the acts of binding up wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and taking strangers in their own arms, were progressively attenuated in favor of paying for care and lodging at an inn. In the name of extending embedded relationships, which are certainly more onerous than disembedded ones, the burden of the extension

1 Polanyi, Karl. (1944) *The Great Transformation.* New York: Rinehart.

was lightened by means of a division of labor that serves as another aspect of disembedding — an aspect that the economist Adam Smith saw as a foundation of increased economic productivity. To multiply this good, the good was itself was transformed and — in Illich's eyes — corrupted.

This pursuit of disburdenment in Christian history is a trajectory that Albert Borgmann[2] — to whom Taylor has also referred — finds manifest in modern technology as well. Going beyond division of labor in the factory, the design of mass-produced consumer goods has pursued what Borgmann calls the paradigm of the device — a product provides commodities freed of the demands of work and labor on the part of users. Just as the hospital disburdens the Christian from the personal work of caring for the stranger, so the central heating system disburdens the householder from cutting wood and tending the hearth to warm the home.

For Illich, however, disembedding and disburdenment also reference a physical experience, and are intimately associated with "disembodying." In our increasingly technoscientific world — as has, for instance, been analyzed especially by Illich and his colleague Barbara Duden[3] — the foundations of our sensory experience are increasingly replaced by scientifically instrumented knowledge and artifact-enabled behavior, both of which have their own roots in Christian history. The disinterring of these multiple roots involves a complex historical archeology that it is not necessary to review in detail here, when simply trying to appreciate one conclusion — namely, the creation of a system of services for the sick, poor, and needy which leads, Illich ultimately argues, to the experiencing of ourselves in system terms.

2 Borgmann, Albert. (1984) *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

3 Duden, Barbara. (1993) *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn.* Trans. Lee Hoinacki. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

"Now," Taylor continues, "most people, whether Christian or not, would see this as a positive credit to Christianity, as a 'progressive' move in history for which the Church is responsible." In other words, most people would endorse as good all of the following: the institutionalization of charity in hospitals and international non-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross/Crescent; advances in scientific knowledge about such abstract phenomena as global climate change (what is experienced is not climate but weather); developments of technological disembedding and disburdenment in agriculture, transportation, and communication; and transformations of embodiment in medicine — including the theory and practical utilization of statistics and probability in all sorts of healthcare decision making systems from epidemiological policy formulation to therapeutic diagnosis. "Without necessarily denying that good has come from this," writes Taylor, "Illich sees also [the] dark side [of such achievements]. In particular, he sees the way [they have] worked out a profound betrayal of the Christian message." (p. 737)

Indeed, Illich has himself summarized his interpretation of this betrayal as follows:

> [O]ne of the ways of understanding the history of Western Christianity is as a progressive loss of the sense that the freedom for which Christ is our model and our witness is folly. The Western Church, in its earnest effort to institutionalize this freedom, has tended to transform supreme folly first into desirable duty, and then into legislated duty. It is folly to be hospitable in the way the Samaritan is — pure folly if you really think it through. To make of this a duty and then create categories of people towards whom this duty is owing witnesses to a brutal form of earnestness. More than that, this inversion of the extraordinary folly that became possible through the Gospel represents a mystery of evil (Cayley, 2005, p. 58)

The corruption of the best is the worst. Illich's experience of what he refers to as the monstrosity or horror of the modern substitution of institutional action for the possibility of a human relationship that breaks the bonds of social order — as exemplified in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan — was itself made possible by Christianity and even promoted by certain well-intentioned actions on the part of the Christian Church, especially the Christian Church of the Latin-speaking West. According to Illich, there is a dependency of modernity on Christianity, the best or highest or most perfect revelation or faith, that can itself best be described as its corruption.

Felix Culpa

This theory that the corruption of the best is the worst is, in the history of Christian theology, counterbalanced by a notion that corruption can lead to or be a necessary preparation for the better. In the words pronounced with the kindling of the Pascal candle during the Easter Vigil: *O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est! O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!* "O truly necessary sin of Adam, that was blotted out by the death of Christ! O happy fault, that merited so great a Redeemer!" What is apparently absent in Illich's interpretation of the Fall of Christian history is any sense that this might be a happy fall or fault, one necessary for or preparatory to a greater revelation or reality.

With this reference and suggestion, however, let me immediately confess to a deep uneasiness. I cannot help but fear that by placing such a perspective in play, I may be making things worse — *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.* Is it not, for instance, a variant of the theology of *felix culpa* that Illich himself criticized with his scornful rejection in the 1970s of Left wing "apocalyptic randiness" — and on which now rest the confident enthusiasms, if not perverse hopes,

of some fundamentalist evangelicals toward the possibility of nuclear conflagration in the Middle East? Yet even aware as I am of the limitations of my own understanding in this regard, might it not be that Illich himself would encourage me to continue — to try to articulate my uneasy double-bind about where he leaves his interpretation and where it might still be taken? In this ambivalent conflict of intentions, let me venture the following three hypothetical commentaries.

First, suggesting that the notion of *felix culpa* is absent from Illich is not wholly accurate. In his discussion with David Cayley of the *mysterium iniquitatis,* Illich describes the unprecedented "horror, cruelty, and degradation" that he experiences as present in modernity understood as a perversion of revelation. Then, admitting that he stammers, Illich says that seeing modernity as a new and mysterious kind of evil induces the "temptation — I can't avoid saying it, I cannot go on without saying it — of cursing God's Incarnation."[4] In a footnote, Cayley seeks to clarify this admission by noting how God's omniscience requires foreknowledge of the perverse consequences of Revelation. He further quotes an off-the-record remark by Illich from another occasion: "The Absurdistan, or hell-on-earth, in which we live is something Jesus must have foreseen, and it must therefore have been his intention in his founding of the Church." Thus, according to Cayley, "Illich speaks here of 'an intense temptation' to 'curse God's Incarnation' not in order to threaten blasphemy but in order to dramatize the unique, mysterious, world-devouring character of the evil he is trying to describe" (p. 239). Given God's supreme goodness, Cayley might also have observed, God must intend good through such consequences. (The thought here is complicated by Illich's preferred term, "Incarnation" over "Revelation," since the paradox of Incarnation promoting dis-

4 Cayley, David. (2005) *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich*. Toronto: Anansi.p.61

embodiment requires an extended historical analysis.) There is therefore a hint that this evil, this corruption of the Gospel, could, in God's providence, be prefatory to a greater good. Yet this is not a possibility that Illich himself explores. Instead, he turns again to attempt to characterize the corruption itself and its sources.

Illich's argument regarding how the *corruptio optimi pessima* principle operates with regard to the Christian doctrine of the contingency of creation provides a good illustration of his argument. According to Illich, the teaching regarding the coming into being of the world *creatio ex nihilo* was progressively deepened into a doctrine of the complete dependency of created nature on a supernatural God. The integration of this doctrine into the body of European culture took place over centuries in what might be described as the mental digestive reflections of a diversity of thinkers from Philo of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo to Ibn Sina and Thomas Aquinas, all operating under Jewish, Christian, and Islamic influences. This history of more than ideas brought something new into existence: not just at the intellectual but at a subconscious, sensual, feeling level of the world as through and through contingent, with no reality or being of its own, as the gift of an all-powerful God. But the dependency on God is a fragile one. When God is initially made more and more remote in the early years of modernity, and then finally knocked away entirely by the Enlightenment, it is not possible to return to the self-sufficient nature and cosmos of the Greeks. Instead, humans are left with a nature or creation that is no longer a creation and thus a mere something or stuff to be freely manipulated, violently exploited, blown up, and controlled.

But why is it not possible to return to the pre-Christian cosmos that exists on its own in self-sufficient and self-subsistent splendor? Why is it not possible simply to inquire, con-

cerning the doctrine of the Incarnation, whether this was the true or best interpretation of an experience of the divine that was for many years and for many people during the first centuries of the Christian era a deeply ambiguous and indeterminate revelation? Illich himself calls our attention to the rich conflict of interpretations during this period, and on occasion seeks to resurrect interpretations and doctrines that have been marginalized by Christian history. Is it not reasonable and possible to reconsider some of the non-marginalized doctrines? Are we no more than the victims of a historically determined interpretation of the development of Christian doctrine?

Second, equally prominent in what Illich calls the monstrosity and horror of institutionalization and disembedding sponsored by Christianity is violence. The evil about which Illich wants to awaken us is subtle, one that perverts obvious goods so that they become evils of less than obvious character. But in the scholarly world the subtle sometimes crowds out the obvious. Much more obvious are the evils of the terrorist actions of the Islamicist airplane hijackers of September 11, 2001, and the repetitive suicide bombings of their own co- religionists, actions that disclose what I now interpret as an endemic orientation toward violence — not just in Islam but across a host of Jewish and Christian traditions and institutions as well.

There were no doubt adequate reasons to reach this conclusion before 9/11. Take the chronicles of the conquest of Canaan and the cursing psalms from the Hebrew Scriptures; recall the Crusades and the virulence of anti-Semitism from St.John Chrysostom through Martin Luther; and consider the Muslim faith-fueled wars against Hindu and Buddhist cultures as manifested, for example, in the Mogul empire of the 16th century. But the events of 9/11 shocked me into recognizing what I had previously been able to ignore or hide from myself. Efforts that I made in the 1970s, as a member of

a lay religious community inspired by the *Regula* of St. Benedict, to interpret the cursing psalms in metaphorical terms, now strike me as artificial in the extreme. The arrogant righteousness of Psalm 69, which is quoted on eight occasions in the Greek Scriptures, calls on God to "blot [one's enemies] from the book of the living"; when Psalm 137, the last line of which is quoted three times in the New Testament, proclaims that "Happy is he who takes your children and dashes them against the rock," this is much more than an allegory for the struggle of the righteous with their own sinful natures.

Certainly, there are propensities to violence inherent to human nature, propensities well manifested outside the Judeo-Christian-Islamic ambience — from Alexander the Great through Genghis Khan to Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong. But Buddhism, for instance and especially, has challenged such tendencies and argued their fundamental immorality, not just with regard to humans but in relation to all sentient beings, more than any of the religions of the book. The three Abrahamic religions more often seem to cultivate rationalizations for the conquest and killing of humans and non-humans alike. In addition, it is not clear that the righteous reaction to the industrialized slaughter that characterized 20th century weapons development programs and political practice has been an effective way to address these new forms of institutionalized violence. The claim by some peoples that God has abandoned them to a slaughter only highlights beliefs that God has given them special roles in history, roles that have repeatedly justified their own righteous violence. The pious justifications for massive killing in the manifestos of Al Qaida leader Osama Bin Laden are echoed by the declarations of unrepentant sovereignty in the cocky swagger of President George W. Bush.

Such a provocation can serve as a transition to my third commentary in the hypothetical mode (to adopt a notion of which Illich himself is fond — the idea of exploring

a hypothesis). I cannot help but sense something of the contrived or artificial in some of Illich's rhetoric regarding modernity. Again, I present this hypothesis with some trepidation. Certainly, I do not in the least doubt the sincerity of Illich's struggle with his heritage of Mediterranean Christianity and what he calls its transmogrification during his lifetime. But in Illich's characterizations of the corruptions of Christianity as "monstrosity" and "horror" I find intimations of a rhetorical imposition, not to say violence, with which I am less than comfortable. Is it really honest or appropriate to utilize such words, most commonly applied to Stephen King and slasher movies, when trying to describe a trajectory of spiritual decay or unintentional reversal?

Grant for the sake of argument the reality of the experiential or phenomenological evil of institutionalization, disembedding, and disembodying about which Illich seeks to enlighten. In truth, I think of myself as largely sharing Illich's critical assessment of the disembedding, technoscientific world in which we are now forced to live, even while I am ill at ease with some of the rhetorical formulations he adopts. But does this corruption not call for more than jeremiad— that is, for some analytic characterization of the different modes it can take? Are there not natural forms of decay as exhibited by living organisms in the process of returning to the dust from which they came that deserve to be distinguished, for instance, from the behavioral decadence arising from failures to abide by moral laws? Natural decay can serve to remind us of a former beauty and its fragility, can highlight the splendor of a passing achievement, whereas cultural decadence may serve as a moral lesson or cautionary warning. Surely there is more than one possible response to a *corruptio optimi*.

Consider the following possible reflective counterpoint to that of Illich. Illich appears to present it as a kind of confirmation of the higher truth of a Christian doctrine such as that

of the Incarnation or of the theology of radical contingency that their corruptions have led to such disastrous results. Then rejecting the results, he seems to feel trapped between the doctrines and their consequences. But why not turn the argument around and allow the corruption to sponsor a questioning of the originating doctrine and theology? Is there no alternative to blasphemy or the principle of *felix culpa*?

A Questioning Response

The corruption of the best is the worst. For Plato and the Greeks this was a *reductio ad absurdum* criticism of the pursuit of what might look like perfection. The "perfection" of the *polis*, for instance, in Plato's *Politeia*, which is the perfection of the individual human writ large, is presented as something brought about by immoderate desire. The corrupt city, one in need of purgation by the philosopher king, grows precisely from a rejection of the human condition as no better than a city for pigs. The Christian tradition appears both attracted to and repulsed by the replacement for what might well be called the "divine city," that is, the city of high affluence which, because of its associated diseases, must therefore be subjected to a therapy of desire. Yet is not Socrates' dialectic engagement with Glaucon and Adiemantus a fundamental criticism of utopianism and its evils, evils that include the leading of all adults "into the fields", and a forced rule by philosophers — actions that find echoes in what James C. Scott (1998) calls high modernist social engineering?[5] At the end of the dialogue, would Socrates reject as impossible a return to the healthy city that he had been forced to abandon by the mis-perceptions of his interlocutors?

Take another instance of the *corruptio* principle, Lord Acton's famous statement that "Power tends to corrupt, and

5 Scott, James C. (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Taylor, Charles. (2007) *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

absolute power corrupts absolutely." Is such a *corruptio* not regularly and reasonably understood to imply and entail the rejection of absolute power, its needful delimitation? Is this not precisely the conclusion argued for by Jacques Ellul), a colleague to whom Illich once paid homage, when he proposed in the face of the increasing powers of modern technology an "ethics of nonpower" — a voluntary detachment from and abandonment of the temptations that are part and parcel of our corrupted experience?[6]

Indeed, I would dare to suggest that there is a paradox if not a contradiction in Illich's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. His interpretation points toward, if it does not presume, a freedom of the will empowered with the ability to constitute by its action a new reality or relationship — a presumption that borders on a philosophical decisionism (*Dezisionismus*). At one and the same time, Illich appears to claim that Christians have brought by their formative actions something utterly new into existence, and that it is not possible for them to reform or turn away from this new existence when it turns out to be an unintended evil.

Why should the same decisionism that made possible the evil not make equally possible its rejection? The anti-theological decisionism of Friedrich Nietzsche, for instance, is transcended by a doctrine of the eternal return of the same. Is there no theological equivalent apart from the principle of *felix culpa*?

Toward a Buddhist Alternative

Yet surely there is a profound realism in what has, on another occasion, been described as Illich's stance of elegiac lament. Indeed, Illich has described himself as needing to "accept powerlessness, mourn that which is gone, renounce

6 Ellul, Jacques. (1980) "The Ethics of Nonpower." Trans. Nada K. Levy. In Melvin Kranzberg, ed., *Ethics in an Age of Pervasive Technology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), pp. 204-212.

the irrecoverable" (Illich, 1992, p. 4). The course of Illich's life, his "biology" in the literal sense, can thus be characterized in terms of a great arc from radical social criticism in the days of *Deschooling Society* (1971) to a meditation on the dark night of history. From Illich's perspective, then, would not any attempt, stimulated by the fire of 9/11, to trace out an arc from Christianity to Buddhism, not be profoundly naive, unrealistically romantic, even laughable at my age? Is it not presumptuous to think that one can walk away from my Atlantic version of a Mediterranean Christian heritage? In addition, is not Buddhism itself just as fatally flawed by its own *corruptio optimi pessima* in the forms of passive nihilism, resignation, and contamination by the Buddhist samurai culture of Japan?

In response it is perhaps permissible to speak somewhat personally, even existentially. Insofar as I put forth the hypothesis of something contrived or artificial in some of Illich's rhetoric regarding modernity, it is because of my own struggle with contrivance and artificiality. From my early years I contrived to see myself as a Christian, all the while sensing something artificial in my self-description. My sense of inauthenticity was always more of artifice than sense.

One reason I was uncomfortable in this regard was that I could never say with honesty that I had a personal relationship with Jesus. I came of age in the suburban Methodism of Dallas, Texas, but never experienced the inspirational faith of my evangelical peers. In a conversation with my pastor that I can still recall, I once tried to discuss reading Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1957), only to have the minister respond: "You should not be reading that kind of book. If you are reading that book, your soul is already in danger."

A few years later I discovered Evelyn Underhill's distinction between Christocentric and theocentric religious experience, which seemed to provide a way to be Christian

without a personal relationship to Jesus.[7] Describing my spirituality as theocentric rather than Christocentric provided a way to place myself in the larger tradition of Catholicism which I was then attempting to practice. Yet even in this, there was a sense of doubt, of uneasiness, of forced self-definition that never quite took hold. Sometimes I felt like I was remaining Christian out of fear: fear of the possibility that I would be damned if I did not accept God's gift.

One repeated image that can be found in the works of C.S. Lewis is of people placing themselves in hell by rejecting the suggestions of transcendence found in the presence of longing and desire.[8] One night, the dead Cistercian monk and writer, Thomas Merton, with whom I had once corresponded, appeared to me in a dream and said, "Your doubts only take you more deeply into Christ." But in the morning, it felt more like an illusion — indeed, a dream. So I confess to always being unclear about what to make of Illich's own clear commitment to both Jesus of Nazareth and the Catholic church, even during my life as a non-practicing Catholic, during which time I often sought to take his faith as model or inspiration for an alternative something that might somehow become my own.

Now, stimulated precisely by Illich's interpretation *corruptio optima pessima*, the non-theism of the way of the Buddha and the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, appears as a more authentic commitment, in part because of its ahistoricist character. Taylor's analysis of the secular age as determined by the historical presence of conditions of choice with regard to faith is an analysis that complements Illich's, but again seems to pose the same paradox: Why should such conditions of choice not open up wider possibilities than those between different types of Christianity or between Christian-

7 Underhill, Evelyn. (1925) *The Mystics of the Church.* London: Clark.

8 Lewis, C.S. (1943) *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism.* 3rd edition. London: Geoffrey Bles.

ity and some rejection of religion?

Could it not be true that life is suffering, that suffering is caused by craving, that suffering can end, and that there is a path which can lead to the end of suffering? Additionally, does not the Buddhist teaching of dependency between mind and experience allow us to think of bringing alternative ways of life into existence — ways of life that have historical reality but are not thereby determinative of such reality? In the words of the opening verses of the *Dhammapada*:

> Mind is the forerunner of all states,
> which are in turn mind-made.
> If one speaks or acts with clouded mind,
> suffering follows,
> just as the cartwheel follows the hoof of the ox that pulls it.
>
> Mind is the forerunner of all states,
> which are in turn mind-made.
> If one speaks or acts with pure mind,
> contentment follows,
> just like a never separating shadow.

Consider, however, the *corruptio* of such a teaching: On the one side, is it not, as the French historian of religion L. De la Vallée Poussin maintained, a spiritual nihilism that negates the world of appearance and existence?[9] Has such nihilism not been further contaminated by its use in the justification of Japanese militarism during the 20th century? On the other, is such a Buddhist *corruptio* not to be preferred to that derived from the corruption of Christianity which, according to Illich, yields a world so committed to appearance and existence that it attempts to take control

9 Vallée-Poussin, Louis de la. (1917) "Nihilism (Buddhist)." In James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribner's), vol. 9, pp. 372- 373.

and dominate through systematic disembedding and modern technology? In comparison, is the Buddhist *corruptio* — and therefore Buddhism — not to be preferred?

At the same time there remains something naive about such an argument. There is no doubt that we who are heirs, even when we do not wish to be, of a distinctly Mediterranean corruption cannot easily and simply walk away. Yet is there no nobility in the attempt? To think instead that such an attempt is simply that of the fool, would this not be somehow ignoble — a *corruptio pessimi* or corruption, if such were possible, even of the worst?

The argument from comparative corruption might then be stated thus: The corruption of Christianity can lead to a greater evil than the corruption of Buddhism. On the one side, this can be interpreted as an argument for the greatness of Christianity, *corruptio optimi pessima*. On the other, insofar as the corruption of Buddhism leads to lesser evils, can one not also propose it as better, more fitting, for that ambivalent condition in which humans find themselves? Such is the paradoxical hypothesis to which my wandering reflection on Illich's hypothesis *corruptio optimi quae est pessima* has brought me. Again, for the corruption that it well may be, I apologize and invite your correction.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Jim Grote for reading and criticizing an earlier version of this argument, to Jean Robert for never ending stimulation of reflection, and to Roberto Ochoa for an invitation that encouraged writing.

ANAKOMIDI

What was Aristotle's life? Well, the answer lay in a single sentence: "He was born, he thought, he died". And all the rest is pure anecdote.

The narrative
Of the bones
Plain

Without the flesh
Of nouns &
Adjectives

Born
Lived
Died

Kostas Hatzikiriakou

Kostas Hatzikiriakou, konshat@gmail.com
Hatzikiriakou, K. ANAKOMIDI
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 276

João Paulo Marques de Lima
Jardim das Pedras, Fernão Magalhães, PELE
Charcoal on cod paper,
Porto, 2018

João Paulo Marques de Lima
Ilha Barão de São Cosmen, FbaupResidency
Sepia ink on paper,
2018/2019

João Paulo Marques de Lima
Jardim das Pedras, Fernão Magalhães, PELE
Charcoal on cod paper,
Porto, 2018

Translations

Doze Anos Após Nêmesis da Medicina: Um Apelo por uma História do Corpo*

By Ivan Illich

Translation from English by Neto Leão and Nilo Coradini de Freitas

Doze anos atrás [em 1973], escrevi "Nêmesis da Medicina"[1]. O livro inicia com a seguinte declaração: "O establishment médico se tornou uma enorme ameaça à saúde"[2]. Ao ouvir isso hoje, eu responderia "e daí?". Atualmente, suspeito que o maior patógeno é a busca por um corpo saudável. E essa empreitada, é importante ressaltar, tem uma história.

Enquanto causa pública, a busca primeiro aparece com a emergência do Estado-nação. Povos passaram a constituir um recurso, uma "população". A saúde se tornou uma norma qualitativa para exércitos e então, durante o século XIX, para trabalhadores, e mais tarde, para mães. Na Prússia, como na França, a polícia médica foi encarregada de sua aplicação. Mas a busca da saúde era também entendida como um direito pessoal, como a realização física do direito jeffersoniano à busca da felicidade. O sonho valetudinário de uma velhice ativa, e a demanda da economia por trabalhadores produtivos e reprodutores férteis se mesclaram na ideia de saúde. Mas o que começou como um dever e um direito foi aparentemente transformado em uma necessidade premente. Em 1985, eu colocaria a fenomenologia histórica desta nova necessidade

* Consulta sobre "Health and Healing in America" [Saúde e Cura na América], Pennsylvania State University [Universidade Estadual da Pensilvânia]. Janeiro, 1985.

1 Ivan Illich. *A Expropriação da Saúde: Nêmesis da Medicina*. trad. bras. de José Kosinski de Cavalcanti. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1975. [N.T.]

2 Na versão brasileira lê-se: "A empresa médica ameaça à saúde". [N.T.]

Illich, I. Doze Anos Após Nêmesis da Medicina:
Um Apelo por uma História do Corpo
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 287 - 295

no centro da pesquisa. Para muitos de nossos contemporâneos, a busca por saúde se tornou consubstancial à experiência de seus corpos.

Desde que escrevi "Nêmesis da Medicina", o caráter simbólico dos cuidados em saúde mudou. Americanos agora pagam mais dinheiro para profissionais de saúde do que gastam em comida ou em abrigo. Um paradoxo instrutivo aparece: medicinas, psicologias, ambientes e arranjos sociais influenciam crescentemente como as pessoas pensam e sentem, enquanto os conceitos e teorias para os quais as profissões apelam são publicamente questionados. Como resultado, os gastos em vários e diversificados programas de bem-estar holístico têm aumentado mais rapidamente do que os custos médicos. A saúde parece estar nas entrelinhas de metade das propagandas, ser a inspiração de metade das imagens da mídia. Alocações para segurança, ecologia, policiamento, educação e defesa civil são melhoradas se conseguem se associar ao cuidado integral em saúde. Portanto, a importância relativa do establishment médico dentro do setor de saúde foi reduzida. Uma mistura curiosa de práticas de autocuidado opinantes e detalhadas junto de um entusiasmo ingênuo por tecnologias sofisticadas tornam os esforços e a atenção pessoal dos médicos cada vez mais frustrantes. Eu suspeito que a contribuição atual da medicina à procura patógena por saúde seja um fator pouco importante.

Em "Nêmesis da Medicina", eu me dediquei a examinar o espectro dos efeitos gerados por agentes médicos. Eu chamei esses efeitos de "iatrogênicos", com um propósito retórico. Eu queria chamar atenção pública à pesquisa sobre a efetividade médica que foi desenvolvida no final dos anos cinquenta e nos anos sessenta. Minha conclusão dizia o óbvio: apenas uma pequena porcentagem da cura, do alívio da dor, da reabilitação, da consolação e da prevenção eram devidos à medicina. A maior parte desses resultados ocorria sem

ou apesar da atenção médica. Além disso, a iatrogênese das doenças é comparável em importância à iatrogênese do bem-estar. O que soava chocante naquele momento, hoje se tornou lugar-comum. Em sua previsão para 1986, o Secretário de Saúde dos Estados Unidos estima que de 80 a 100.000 pacientes serão seriamente feridos pela hospitalização. Mas esse tipo de dano acidental a indivíduos era marginal com relação ao argumento central do meu livro. Eu escrevi para salientar os efeitos institucionais, sociais e culturais do sistema médico. No centro de minha análise estava a remodelação iatrogênica da dor, da doença, da deficiência e do morrer, enquanto a maneira pela qual os sujeitos experimentam tais fenômenos. As restrições culturais dessas experiências e seus impactos simbólicos, uma vez que são mediados pela medicina, eram do meu interesse. Não estou insatisfeito com meu texto, da forma como está, mas estou angustiado por ter estado cego a um efeito iatrogênico simbólico muito mais profundo: a iatrogênese do próprio corpo. Eu negligenciei o grau com que, na metade do século, a experiência de "nossos corpos e nossos eus" [nossos *selfs*] havia se tornado o resultado de cuidados e conceitos médicos.

Eu não reconheci que, além da percepção da doença, da deficiência, da dor e da morte, a própria percepção do corpo havia se tornado iatrogênica. Portanto, minha análise foi deficiente em dois sentidos: eu não esclareci a '*gestalt*' histórica da percepção do corpo daquele período, nem o papel da medicina em moldá-la. E uma vez que eu não estava ciente da natureza iatrogênica do corpo experienciado, eu não explorei sua metamorfose: a emergência de uma percepção do corpo congruente com um estilo de vida pós-profissional de alta tecnologia. Para ganhar perspectiva sobre uma metamorfose contemporânea, a história do corpo se tornou, para mim, uma condição importante para uma vida examinada nos anos oitenta.

Eu encontrei a história do corpo pela primeira vez ao ensinar sobre a Idade Média. Em meus cursos sobre o século XII, eu foco na emergência de certas ideias, em temas e conceitos para os quais a antiguidade não tem verdadeiros equivalentes, mas que no nosso tempo são experienciados como certezas. Um destes é o que chamamos de "nós mesmos" [*our 'selves'*]. "Até cerca de setenta centímetros do meu nariz / está a fronteira da minha pessoa", escrevera W.H. Auden em um de seus poemas. Se você não tem certeza sobre esta distinção entre você mesmo e outros, você não consegue se encaixar na sociedade ocidental. Há um consenso geral que este senso de si emerge com as cruzadas, com as catedrais, com o campesinato e os vilarejos europeus. Além disso, suas formas sucessivas e seu contraste com diferentes culturas é um assunto já bem estudado.

Pouca atenção foi dada ao fato de que o Eu [o *self*] ocidental é experienciado como carne e sangue, que o nascimento do Eu rendeu à Europa um corpo de experiência diferente de qualquer outro. Em colaboração com uma colega que estuda o corpo no princípio do século XVIII, desenvolvi conceitos necessários para uma fenomenologia histórica do corpo. Logo conheci outros interessados nas mesmas questões em diferentes períodos e contextos. Conforme a história do corpo toma forma, somos capazes de entender como cada momento histórico é encarnado em um corpo específico de cada época. Nós agora começamos a decifrar o corpo da experiência subjetiva como uma encarnação única do *ethos* de uma era. Por meio desses estudos, aprendi a ver o corpo ocidental como uma corporificação progressiva do eu [*self*].

Procurando por um elemento comum que pudesse me ajudar a interpretar as diferentes mudanças na transição de uma visão de mundo românica para uma gótica, me deparei com a noção de história do corpo. Eu precisava explicar como o odor da santidade pôde desaparecer entre 1110

e 1180, como as relíquias à vista podiam provocar curas, as circunstâncias sob as quais os corpos das pobres almas assumiram suas formas no purgatório. Por que os zoomorfos que decoravam o interior das igrejas românicas se tornaram gárgulas em posição de decolagem no exterior das catedrais góticas? Como a figura de Cristo, de braços abertos e roupas de realeza, se tornou, pelo ano 1200, o corpo nu, martirizado, pendurado em uma cruz? Como explicar São Bernardo, ao treinar abades para mil monastérios cistercienses reformados, e ao ensinar esses homens a amamentar seus jovens monges com o puro leite de Cristo? E, o que é mais importante, devido às imensas consequências sociais, comecei a entender o contexto no qual as ideias modernas de sexo e casamento tomaram forma. Homens e mulheres foram dotados de corpos "humanos" que cada eu [*self*] poderia dar ao outro, portanto criando laços de parentesco entre suas respectivas famílias, não pela vontade dos anciãos, mas por um contrato legal entre indivíduos que trocam direitos sobre o corpo.

Passei a ver que existia um conhecimento distinto do corpo como local primário de experiência. Esse corpo, específico de uma época, mas sujeito a profundas transformações que às vezes ocorrem em períodos relativamente curtos de tempo, estava paralelo ao, mas claramente distante do, corpo que era pintado, esculpido e descrito. Essa percepção e esse entendimento me revelaram o tipo de crítica que "Nêmesis da Medicina" precisava. No centro do meu argumento, eu havia posto a arte de viver, a habilidade culturalmente moldada e a vontade que alguém tem de viver sua era, carregando-a, suportando-a ou apreciando-a. Enquanto filósofo, eu estava interessado em fomentar e proteger essa arte e suas tradições em uma época de intensa medicalização do cotidiano. Eu tentei mostrar que a arte de viver tem ambos lados radiante e sombrio, é possível falar de uma arte de desfrutar e uma arte de sofrer. Sobre esse ponto, eu fui criticado por algumas

pessoas que questionavam meus motivos para redefinir "cultura" de uma maneira subjetiva. Meus críticos diziam que ao enfatizar os benefícios de uma cultura que é o modelo e o resultado de uma "arte de sofrer", eu falava como um masoquista romântico, ou como um pregador ansioso por refrear qualquer expectativa de progresso. Outros aplaudiram minha tentativa de enraizar o conceito de cultura em um significado experienciado de sofrimento pessoal.

A história do corpo, no entanto, me levou a ver o que genuinamente faltava em minha análise. Gozo e sofrimento são conceitos abstratos. Nomeiam formas opostas nas quais sensações são culturalmente incorporadas. O gozo se refere à encarnação cultural do prazer, e o sofrer à topologia da frustração, da depressão, da angústia e da dor. Cada época tem seu estilo de experimentar a condição humana, que, tradicionalmente, tem sido chamada de "carne".

Até recentemente, eu via o corpo como um fato natural que ficava de fora do domínio do historiador. Não tinha entendido a diferença, que pode ser grande, entre o corpo experienciado e outros objetos menos efêmeros que o historiador deve examinar pelo seu uso e significado. Meu espanto ao não encontrar um corpo como o meu no século XII me levou a reconhecer o "corpo" iatrogênico dos anos sessenta como o resultado de uma construção social que pertencia apenas a uma geração.

Me dei conta de que o sistema médico não pode engendrar um corpo, mesmo se cuidar de alguém da sua concepção até a sua morte cerebral. Em todas as épocas, corpos existem apenas em contexto e formam o equivalente sentido de uma era, na medida em que essa era pode ser experimentada por um grupo específico. Na maior parte dos períodos, as mulheres parecem ter tipos diferentes de corpos em relação aos homens, os servos tipos diferentes daqueles dos senhores. É o sentimento do paciente que diz ao médico o que prescre-

ver. Os primeiros a consertar os novos moinhos de vento que apareceram no século XIII, os mecânicos itinerantes, eram evitados pela gente da cidade como do campo por causa de sua assombrosa sensibilidade tátil.

Na sociogênese de nossos corpos, o transporte desempenha um papel tão grande quanto a medicina. Corpos que requerem transporte diário era algo impensável poucas gerações atrás. Dizemos que "vamos a tal lugar" quando na verdade dirigimos ou voamos. Manuais de engenharia falam em "autotransporte" quando usamos nossos pés no lugar de um elevador. E nos sentimos no direito às muletas '*high-tech*' [de alta tecnologia], nos sentimos despojados caso tenhamos que voltar a usar nossos pés. Posso entender o corpo dos americanos durante o período da guerra do Vietnã como pertencendo ao *homo transportandus*, e caricaturar tal corpo como o apavorado, pelo câncer, consumidor de Valium [diazepam]. Mas após alguns estudos, penso que os termos mais aptos devem se referir a uma transição que agora acontece: a dissolução do corpo iatrogênico em um corpo feito para e pela alta tecnologia. Ao escolher o adjetivo "iatrogênico", chamo atenção à relação especial entre o establishment médico e a percepção corporal, uma relação que agora se dissolve diante dos meus olhos. Vejo que algo de diferente está tomando forma.

Por volta da metade desse século [XX], o establishment médico chegou a uma influência sem precedentes sobre a construção social dos corpos. Designers se referiam às normas médicas para criarem novos móveis ou automóveis; as escolas e a mídia inundaram a imaginação com fantasias médicas e/ou psiquiátricas; e as estruturas dos sistemas de bem-estar ou de seguros treinaram a todos para serem pacientes. Nós experimentamos um momento especial na história quando uma agência, nomeadamente a medicina, não esteve longe de exercer um monopólio sobre a construção social da realidade corpórea.

Normalmente a gênese do corpo sentido não pode ser atribuída a uma única agência. Quando a praga chegou à Florença entre 1622 e 1623, nenhum sistema de cuidado em saúde foi mobilizado. Em um estudo notável, Giulia Calvi descreve como a cidade inteira reagiu ao desafio do flagelo[3]. Barbeiros e cirurgiões, junto de fabricantes de velas e vendedores de sais aromáticos, magistrados e coveiros, capelães de santuários especiais para casos desesperados e mercantes de incenso, cada um teve sua resposta particular à epidemia. Cada "guilda" foi mobilizada para se tornar um "anticorpo" à praga. A carne de cada florentino, homem ou mulher, angustiado ou doente, foi retida, interpretada e refletida por diferentes espelhos. Nenhum corpo profissional poderia capturar, em um único espelho, a carne afligida. Nenhuma agência foi dotada com o poder de estabelecer o corpo sentido enquanto tal. A aposta da metade do século XX por tal monopólio, por parte da medicina, foi sem precedentes e, como se vê, de vida curta.

Eu passei a acreditar que o establishment médico perdeu sua reivindicação durante os últimos dez anos [de 1975 a 1985]. O poder profissional sobre a definição da realidade chegou em seu apogeu e está agora em declínio. Nesse momento, uma mistura confusa de sabedoria de alta tecnologia e de ervas, bioengenharia e exercício autônomo operam para criar uma realidade sentida, incluindo aquela do corpo. Vinte anos atrás [em 1965] era comum se referir ao "corpo que eu tenho" como "meu corpo". Sabemos que essa referência à propriedade na fala cotidiana é pós-cartesiana. Aparece pela primeira vez em todas as línguas europeias com a difusão do individualismo possessivo, um fenômeno bem descrito por C. B. McPherson[4]. Mas agora, frequentemente encontro jo-

3 Giulia Calvi. *Storie di un Anno di Peste: Comportamenti sociali e immaginario nella Firenze Barocca*. Milão: Bompiani, 1984. [N.T.]

4 Crawford B. Macpherson. *A Teoria Política do Individualismo Possessivo*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2009. [N.T.]

vens que sorriem quando alguém não se "identifica" com o seu corpo. Falam do corpo que "são", mas então paradoxalmente, se referem a ele como "meu sistema".

Durante os anos sessenta, a profissão médica foi proeminente em determinar o que o corpo é e como ele deve se sentir. Durante os anos setenta, ela começou a compartilhar o poder de objetificar as pessoas com outras agências. De um empreendimento que objetifica as pessoas enquanto corpos ou psiques, um novo modelo surgiu que engendra pessoas que objetificam a si mesmas: aquelas que concebem a si mesmas como "produtoras" de seus corpos. É, até agora, apenas uma parte de uma nova matriz epistemológica em processo de formação. Pode ser que seja uma que põe em evidência pessoas que experienciam a si mesmas como contribuintes de um complexo programa de computador e como parte de seu texto. Nada me parece mais importante agora do que a clara distinção entre a tendência atual do "fisiculturismo" [*body building*] e a arte tradicional de incarnar [*embodying*] a cultura.

A Propósito de la Vida:
Carta Abierta a Jean-Pierre Dupuy y Wolfgang Palaver*

By David Cayley

Translation from English by Hernando Calla

> "Y los galaaditas se apoderaron de los vados del Jordán contra los efraimitas. Y cuando cualquier fugitivo de Efraím decía, "Déjenme pasar", los hombres de Galaad le preguntaban, "¿Eres un efraimita?" Si respondía que "No", ellos le decían, "Pues di Chibbolet", y él decía, "Sibbolet", porque no podía pronunciarlo correctamente; entonces lo agarraban y lo degollaban en los vados del Jordán. Y allí cayeron en esos tiempos 42 mil efraimitas". (Jueces 12: 3-6)

Un *shibboleth* [indicador de origen] es una línea divisoria, y las líneas divisorias son más filosas cuanto más delgadas son. Para los efraimitas el precio de 42 mil vidas no era sino lo que los lingüistas llaman un fricativo sordo. Las cosas no son tan malas para nosotros, pero la pandemia sin duda trajo la división entre amigos. (¿Y cuán grandes, después de todo, eran las diferencias entre efraimitas y galaaditas, si todo lo que los diferenciaba era la capacidad para emitir este sonido crucial?) Uno de los shibboleths que nos dividen parece ser la *vida*. Hace poco, dos admirados amigos han discrepado conmigo sobre esta palabra y la interpretación que di de las opiniones de Illich sobre el tema. En una entrevista publicada el 23 de diciembre de 2020 en el semanario alemán *Die Zeit*,

* Del original *Concerning Life: An Open Letter To Jean- Pierre Dupuy And Wolfgang Palaver* en blog del autor el 11 de junio 2021 [https://www.davidcayley.com/blog/2021/6/11/concerning-life-1]. Algunos paréntesis incluyen términos clave del original, algunos corchetes son sugerencias del traductor, La Paz – Bolivia, 30 de marzo de 2023

Cayley, D. A Propósito de la Vida:
Carta Abierta a Jean-Pierre Dupuy y Wolfgang Palaver.
Conspiratio, Spring 2023, p. 296 - 325

el teólogo Wolfgang Palaver expresa preocupación de que la afirmación de Illich que la *vida* se ha vuelto "un fetiche" esté siendo mal utilizada como justificación para "sacrificar a los débiles". En tanto que el filósofo francés Jean-Pierre Dupuy, en un articulo para el sitio web AOC intitulado "El verdadero legado de Iván Illich", razona de manera parecida que algunos de los que siguen "la moda de 'dudar del covid' (*covidoscepticism*)" malinterpretan y distorsionan las críticas de Illich sobre "la idolatría de la vida". El artículo de Dupuy es la segunda parte de su polémica contra la "pretendida 'sacralización de la vida'". El primero denuncia lo que Dupuy llama "la ceguera de los intelectuales".

En el ensayo de Dupuy se me alude de una forma que halaga mis logros como interlocutor de Illich antes de "sucumbir al espíritu de la época". "¡Ay, mil veces ay!", lamenta Dupuy, que "el propio Cayley" haya "sucumbido al espíritu la época" y ahora "multiplique sus estereotipos y manifieste su ignorancia", mientras se dedica a una "clásica minimización de la gravedad de la pandemia". Palaver es más benevolente y no me alude directamente, pero puesto que he sobresalido entre aquellos que han intentado argumentar que "la idolatría de la vida" ha jugado un papel pernicioso en las respuestas políticas a la pandemia, me siento incluido en la compañía de aquellos que él piensa han empujado a Illich a un territorio peligroso, de lejos más allá de su propia intención.

Es mucho lo que está en juego en este asunto. "Salvar vidas" ha justificado cada una de las políticas adoptadas para contrarrestar la pandemia durante el pasado año [2020], y es probable que la *vida* continúe como el símbolo sagrado en el que afincará su legitimidad el orden social reestructurado que emerge de la pandemia. Por consiguiente, parece importante que intentemos aclarar qué se pretende decir ahora con esta palabra. (Espero que mi uso frecuente de cursivas se entienda como una forma de señalar la utilización que quiero cuestion-

ar). Empezaré intentando entender lo que les preocupa a Palaver y Dupuy, luego presentaré lo que me parece es la visión de Illich y concluiré con alguna reflexión sobre el papel de la *vida* en el orden social que está emergiendo en el presente.

Palaver y Dupuy se preocupan de lo que llaman la protección o preservación de la vida. Ambos sostienen que los que "minimizan" la pandemia, critican las medidas adoptadas para combatirla, o desdeñan las normas para contenerla están irresponsablemente poniendo en peligro a su prójimo. Ambos se enfocan particularmente en el filósofo italiano Giorgio Agamben como el paradigma de esta insensatez. Agamben ha argumentado a lo largo de la pandemia que la respuesta oficial equivale a destruir la comunidad para poder salvarla. Al dejar que los viejos mueran solos y sin nadie que los consuele, al hacer que las personas se tengan miedo entre sí y al prohibir los funerales, las ceremonias religiosas y otras formas elementales de vida social y cultural, ha escrito Agamben, aniquilamos lo que queda de nuestra forma de vida y permitimos que la medicina se establezca como un culto religioso todopoderoso y prácticamente intocable. Dupuy es abiertamente crítico en sus apreciaciones. La "impostura intelectual" de Agamben, escribe, es la "versión suave" de la misma "violencia reaccionaria" que se puede ver en "los grupos de extrema derecha norteamericanos… gritando, armas en mano, frente a las gradas de sus congresos legislativos". Esto es injusto desde ya, y completamente *ad hominem*, pero Dupuy va más allá. En relación al concepto de "vida desnuda" (*nuda vita*) de Agamben, con el que él se refiere clara y explícitamente a la vida sin atributos culturales que otorgan a la vida forma y dignidad narrativa, Dupuy pretende que como inferencia de este concepto Agamben debe "despreciar… la vida simple, 'animal', de los campesinos pobres sin tierra del noreste brasileño". Me parece que esto bordea en la calumnia, así como en una lectura malintencionada.

Por su parte, Palaver es menos duro y más cauto, pero él también indica estar "molesto" con Agamben. Vale la pena citar *in extenso* el párrafo relevante en la entrevista de Palaver en *Die Zeit*, donde expresa esta consternación:

> Agamben de veras me molesta. Él es más papista que el Papa y más eclesiástico que la Iglesia. Afirma que la Iglesia ha prescindido de la salvación y la ha sacrificado a la salud: puesto que buscó la salvación en la historia, solo podía terminar en la salud. ¡Absurdo! ¿Por qué Jesús curó a la gente y asumió el cuidado de sus dolencias físicas? Las muchas curaciones bastan para contradecir el escape teológico de este mundo que plantea Agamben. Soy el SEÑOR, tu doctor. O piénsese en el milagro de la multiplicación de los panes. Cuando la gente está con hambre, ¡tienes que hacer algo! Agamben practica una mala teología cuando separa la salvación de la salud.
>
> …Agamben lamenta correctamente una actitud para la cual la salud y la sobrevivencia son las cosas más importantes en la vida. Pero aquí uno tendría que preguntar: ¿se trata de mi propia vida? ¿O se trata de la preocupación que tiene que ver con otra gente?

No puedo subestimar la posibilidad de que esto esté mal transcrito, mal traducido o simplemente dicho improvisadamente, pero si es realmente lo que Palaver quiso decir, considero que va muy lejos. Es cierto que Jesús dio de comer y curó a la gente, pero no curó a todos ni dio de comer a cada uno. De hecho, alimentó y curó a la gente tan ocasionalmente que parece justo decir que tales acciones, cuando las realizó, tenían una intención ilustrativa más que administrativa o programática. Esta es la gran polémica en la fábula de Dostoyevski del Gran Inquisidor. El Inquisidor le reprocha a su Señor no convertir las piedras en panes cuando se le

desafía a hacerlo. Debido a esta incapacidad para conceder a la debilidad de la humanidad sufriente, que siempre clama "¡Esclaviza[nos] pero danos de comer! dice el Inquisidor, se hizo necesario que la Iglesia intervenga para "corregir y mejorar" el Evangelio. No pretendo insinuar que Palaver asume la posición del Gran Inquisidor, sino solo señalar una profunda ambigüedad en la percepción de Jesús en el Evangelio como médico. Es cierto, Jesús da de comer y realiza curaciones, pero también declara que el Reino "no [es] de este mundo" y se refiere a él como un ingreso tan estrecho o un camino tan angosto que "pocos lo encuentran". Por tanto, parece desatinado que Palaver acuse a Agamben de un "escape teológico del mundo". Agamben nunca ha pretendido ser un teólogo, y su defensa de "formas de vida" particulares, como los funerales para los muertos o el consuelo humano a los que están agonizando, me parece sumamente mundana. De lo que sí responsabiliza a la Iglesia es de haber olvidado lo mesiánico, y por tanto de haber perdido una necesaria "tensión dialéctica" entre la historia y aquello que la excede o la interrumpe. Es solamente entre "estos polos", afirmó Agamben en un discurso del 2009 en París dirigido a "la Iglesia de nuestro Señor", que "una comunidad puede conformarse y perdurar". Palaver puede objetar, pero en ese caso uno esperaría argumentos en vez de irritación y rechazo ("¡Absurdo!")

El segundo punto que plantea Palaver es que el ciudadano que usa mascarilla y respeta el distanciamiento social no está necesariamente preocupado de su propia vida, sino de las vidas de los demás. Dupuy dice prácticamente lo mismo –no es por mí mismo que tomo precauciones sino por los otros –. En parte esto es muy poco controvertido. Mucho antes del COVID yo habría rehusado salir en medio de la sociedad con una enfermedad contagiosa, y habría esperado la misma consideración de parte de los otros. Pero en un mundo

en que cada uno representa un peligro para cualquier otro y la amenaza de "transmisión asintomática" inhibe toda interacción social sin excepción, me da la impresión que se ha llegado al límite de la "responsabilización" y se lo ha traspasado. La reconceptualización de la sociedad como un sistema inmune agrandado es una fórmula para la disolución social.

Palaver sostiene además que aquellos que argumentan contra la cuarentena y medidas similares se están preparando para "sacrificar a los débiles…". Detrás de esta predisposición dice encontrarse la "lógica del chivo expiatorio" –la lógica del Sumo Sacerdote cuando dice, en los relatos evangélicos de la Pasión, que "es mejor que muera un hombre a que todo el pueblo tenga que perecer". En la comprensión que Palaver comparte con su maestro René Girard, este era el principio arcaico –un sacrificio oportuno preserva el orden social –que primero el judaísmo y luego la cristiandad empezaron a cuestionar y abolir. Todo el "pensamiento utilitario", dice Palaver, reafirma la "lógica sacrificial". "Solo la vida puede orientarnos", concluye él. Estoy de acuerdo, pero mucho depende, como veremos, de qué se pretende decir con la *vida*.

Antes de pasar a Illich no puedo evitar decir, no sin alguna inquietud, que tanto en Palaver como Dupuy, me parece percibir cierto tono de pánico. Alguna vez hace mucho tiempo, después de una conferencia de Illich sobre *Némesis Médica*, uno de los oyentes se aproximó desconcertado a un amigo de Illich y le preguntó inocentemente: "¿qué es lo que quiere? ¿dejar que la gente se muera?" Ambos Dupuy y Palaver son más sofisticados, y están más familiarizados con la obra de Illich de lo que estaba este joven perplejo, y aun así parecen haber llegado finalmente al mismo escollo. Se deben salvar las vidas –más o menos a toda costa –y cualquiera que argumente en sentido contrario ha abandonado ciegamente "la altura del humanismo" (Dupuy) y sucumbido a la "lógica sacrificial" y el "darwinismo social". (Palaver)

Ambos Dupuy y Palaver piensan que quienes siguen la moda de "dudar del covid" están malinterpretando y distorsionando la afirmación de Illich acerca de que la *vida* se ha vuelto "un ídolo" y "un fetiche". Palaver admite que Illich planteó una saludable advertencia, pero tiene la sensación de que se lo está tomando demasiado literalmente. Dupuy afirma que las críticas de Illich sobre la "idolatría de la vida" solo tenían la intención de prevenir la degradación de la vida, de ninguna manera la de limitar su protección y preservación. Para llegar al fondo del asunto, tendremos primero que establecer qué dijo verdaderamente Illich.

En algún momento de 1985 un pastor baptista de nombre Will Campbell abordó a Illich después de una conferencia dirigida a un grupo de trabajadores sociales en Macon, Georgia. En sus papeles privados, Illich guardó un breve recuento, escrito diez años después, de este significativo encuentro:

> [Después de la conferencia] advertí [la presencia de un] hombre con… un… bastón de apoyo con nudos viniendo hacia mí. Se presentó como un predicador: "Will Campbell… quien tiene que pedirle un gran favor". Me quedé sin aliento, pues yo conocía ese nombre, "si es usted la persona que alentaba a Martin Luther King, no me tiene que pedir sino simplemente ordenar, yo obedezco". Él balbuceó algo que terminaba con "…ustedes malditos papistas" y a continuación dijo, "Ustedes se niegan a hablar acerca de la 'vida'. Vea usted, la 'vida' está haciendo tiras a nuestras iglesias. Están esos que condenan la pena capital, pero no la bomba atómica, y otros que reclaman ejecutar a los abortistas. Reuniré a los representantes de nuestras Iglesias para que usted pueda hablarles".
>
> Estuve asustado. Traté de encontrar en mi mente qué sentido darle a esa invitación. Muchos meses después, en

> algún lugar de Ohio, me encontré con una sala repleta de "líderes de iglesia" a los que Campbell había convocado. El ambiente era tenso. Un sacerdote ubicado en primera fila se identificó como el representante de la Conferencia del Arzobispado Católico y me apremió a que empiece con una oración. Tenía que rehusarme a caer en esta trampa; le dije que empezaría con una solemne maldición formal y luego pedí que se salgan los que no estén de acuerdo con una ceremonia de este tipo. A continuación, con todo dramatismo y las manos en alto repetí tres veces, "Al diablo con la vida".

Aparte de la maldición, no conozco qué más habría dicho Illich en esa ocasión –Ohio es un lugar grande, el encuentro no dejo más huellas entre los papeles de Illich, y nunca encontré a nadie que me pueda decir algo más sobre el mismo – pero cuatro años más tarde, en Chicago, Illich dirigió una conferencia convocada por la Iglesia Luterana Estadounidense sobre el mismo tema. Esta conferencia, intitulada "La construcción institucional de un nuevo fetiche: la vida humana", se publicó tres años después en el libro de Illich llamado *En el espejo del pasado*. En esa ocasión Illich le dijo a su audiencia, sin ningún reparo, que "la vida es el ídolo más poderoso que la Iglesia ha tenido que enfrentar en su historia". "Más que la ideología del imperio o el orden feudal, más que el nacionalismo o el progreso, más que el gnosticismo o la ilustración, la aceptación de la vida sustantiva como una realidad dada por Dios se presta a una nueva corrupción de la fe cristiana". La palabra "sustantiva" aquí es importante, y volveré a ello en un momento, pero primero quiero examinar la afirmación de que la reverencia contemporánea por la vida corrompe la fe cristiana.

En los evangelios, Jesús afirma, reiteradamente, que Él es la Vida. "Él no dice, 'Yo soy una vida [ejemplar]'", comenta Illich. "Dice, 'Yo soy la Vida', y punto (*tout court*)". Lo

que se quiere decir es algo más que simplemente estar vivo. La Vida que Jesús encarna y ejemplifica sólo se puede dar y recibir, dice Illich, como un don. En esa calidad, la podemos encontrar, celebrar y compartir, pero nunca puede ser nuestra en el sentido de poderla definir o delimitar, administrar o controlar. Esta manera de pensar y hablar acerca de la vida, en la que la palabra siempre implica una relación con Aquél en cuyo don la Vida descansa, empapó la cultura de la cristiandad por muchos siglos. "Durante mucho más de un milenio", dice Illich, "era algo muy evidente que la gente pueda encontrarse entre los vivos y estar muerta, y otra gente pueda estar muerta y tener vida. Esto no era simplemente un postulado religioso; esto… se convirtió en un supuesto ordinario de la vida cotidiana". Este carácter cotidiano es significativo porque el argumento de Illich era que los "prerrequisitos de la modernidad" fueron creados mediante esta aculturación de las "verdades evangélicas". En su opinión, la modernidad torció, doblegó y mutiló estas verdades, pero nunca habría llegado a ser como tal sin ellas. Esta es la razón por qué Illich se atreve a decir que el lenguaje ordinario actual "abusa de la palabra para el Dios Encarnado". Consideraba a éste un juicio histórico más que teológico. Sigue la pista de los antecedentes de la palabra vida a través de sus varias expresiones en la tradición teológica, filosófica y científica occidental, me decía Illich, y se volverá evidente que su significado, si bien alterado, continúa configurándose dentro del campo que emana de la cristiandad latina.

La manera en que hablamos de la vida está arraigada en una civilización otrora repleta de la creencia en la Encarnación. Y esta "ascendencia cristiana" es compartida por "otras verdades que definen a la sociedad secular". Pero al mismo tiempo el significado del término ha cambiado completamente. Se ha vuelto "sustantivo", dice Illich. Pretende decir con esto que ha asumido el carácter de una sustancia – de algo tangible – y de que ha adquirido sustancia en el sen-

tido más filosófico y teológico de algo que puede existir por sí mismo –se ha vuelto autosubsistente y autosuficiente –. Que la vida se convirtió en una sustancia puede verse, afirma Illich, en los discursos de la ley, la medicina, la economía y la ecología –todos los cuales reclaman a esta sustancia por igual como su jurisdicción y su justificación. La ley la protege –en varios estados de EEUU se puede incluso demandar por una "vida injusta"–, la medicina la extiende, las corporaciones la administran –como fuerza laboral o recursos humanos– y la ecología la estudia. La ciencia de la genética conoce ahora su "lenguaje". La demografía y el periodismo contabilizan incansablemente sus unidades. Las vidas perdidas indexan el desastre; las vidas salvadas indexan el progreso social. La búsqueda de la salud la prolonga; la tecnología la mejora. A la vida se la conoce, como nunca antes y se la gestiona, como nunca antes.

Pero, al mismo tiempo, la vida trasciende toda gestión en la forma de lo que Illich llama un "fetiche". Era uno de sus términos favoritos, escogido más por su poder para escandalizar que por cualquier resonancia antropológica en particular. Un fetiche es un objeto mágico con el poder de canalizar o fijar ciertos sentimientos. "La sociedad tecnológica", dice él, "es particularmente incapaz de generar mitos con los cuales la gente pueda establecer vínculos profundos y enriquecidos". Y sin embargo una sociedad de este tipo requiere, para su sola "preservación rudimentaria", alguna manera de infundir lealtad sentimental y no solo racional. Este es el papel del fetiche. Es "un manto de seguridad… que podemos llevar a cuestas para sentirnos defensores decentes de los valores sagrados". A la vida se la gestiona como un recurso biopolítico; en tanto fetiche empero, es también algo del que puede "hablarse de manera sigilosa como algo misterioso, polimorfo, débil, que exige una protección delicada". Lo que Illich denomina "sentimentalidad epistémica" puede así quedar apegada a la *vida*,

al mismo tiempo en que la *vida* está siendo intensamente gestionada. Vivir bajo el signo de la *vida* es volverse adepto a eludir estas connotaciones aparentemente contradictorias. Uno aprende a deslizarse suavemente de la una a la otra sin que esta operación tenga que volverse consciente de sí misma. Con un único gesto verbal, reverenciamos lo que gestionamos, y gestionamos lo que reverenciamos.

La *vida*, dice Illich, "tiende a vaciar" el "concepto de persona" tanto moral como legalmente. Para él, es en "la noción de 'persona' [que] el humanismo del humanismo occidental está anclado". Una persona posee un límite claro, y una integridad inviolable. Una vida no. Uno *es* una persona; uno puede, como se dice, "hacer algo con su vida". Las vidas pueden ser evaluadas y mejoradas de formas que las personas no pueden. Un doctor, mirándome como a persona, está frente a determinada historia y cierto destino desconocido –hay mucho que él o ella deben saber para poder tratarme–. Un doctor tratándome como una vida puede discernir todo lo que él o ella necesitan saber a partir de los resultados de mis análisis. Las vidas varían, por supuesto, como el médico experimentado reconocerá, pero no de la misma manera en que varían las personas.

Para Illich, la *vida* era también señal de un cambio profundo en la "religiosidad", un término que usaba para referirse a los sentimientos, gestos y actitudes apenas conscientes, los cuales podrían ser dejados de lado por el término más formal de religión. "Mi olfato, mi intuición, y también mi razonamiento me sugieren", decía él en 1992, "que podríamos estar en un umbral histórico, un parteaguas, un punto de transición a una nueva etapa de la religiosidad". Esta idea se había apoderado de él algunos años antes, me dijo, mientras se encontraba en la cocina del departamento de un grupo de estudiantes de posgrado a los que visitó:

> En la puerta del refrigerador había dos imágenes pegadas. Una era el planeta azul y otra el huevo fertilizado. Eran dos círculos casi del mismo tamaño –uno azulado, el otro rosado. Uno de los estudiantes me dijo, "estas son nuestras 'puertas de entrada' al entendimiento de la vida". El término *puerta de entrada* (*doorway*) me impresionó profundamente. Se me quedó por bastantes meses hasta que, por una razón totalmente diferente, …cogí un libro [de] Mircea Eliade. Para muchos de nosotros, Eliade ha sido un maestro de la ciencia religiosa…Y, revisando este libro, llegué a la conclusión de que él saca a relucir, mejor que cualquier otro que yo había estudiado, el concepto de *sacrum*. El término *sacrum*, nombre latino correspondiente a nuestro *sagrado*, ha sido utilizado por los científicos de la religión para describir un lugar particular en la topología de cualquier cultura. Se refiere a un objeto, un lugar o una señal que, al interior de esa cultura, se cree que es –esta joven estaba en lo cierto– una puerta de entrada. Yo siempre lo había pensado como un umbral, un umbral en el que aparece el más allá, aquello que, dentro de esa sociedad, se considera que es verdadera otredad, aquello que, dentro de determinada sociedad, se considera trascendente. Para Eliade, una sociedad se vuelve una unidad consciente no solo en relación con las sociedades vecinas –nosotros no somos *ustedes*– sino también definiéndose en relación con lo que está más allá.

El disco rosado y el disco azul, concluyó Illich, cumplían de manera muy precisa la función que Eliade describió. Así como los megalitos en Stonehenge, la Kaaba en la Meca o el *ónfalo* [ombligo] de la tierra en el antiguo Delfos, ellos eran *sacrums*. Sin embargo, como "emblemas de los hechos científicos", eran *sacrums* de un tipo totalmente nuevo. El "más allá" que asomaba en anteriores "puertas de entrada" hacía señas desde un más allá que era trascendente –lo

opuesto y distinto de este mundo, respecto al cual se consideraba que era radicalmente discontinuo–. Lo que aparece en la puerta de entrada de los dos discos es más de lo mismo, un ámbito de lo invisiblemente pequeño o lo invisiblemente grande a los cuales podemos acceder solo con microscopios electrónicos o mediante el vasto poder explosivo que se requiere para vencer a la gravedad pero que, con todo, no es diferente de lo que está a la mano. Las puertas de entrada en las cuales se experimenta y entiende la *vida* son, en palabras de Illich, "una frontera sin más allá". Al igual que la virtualidad interminable que se extiende más allá de la pantalla del ordenador, ellas se abren a una infinitud sin diferencia. La nueva religiosidad que él había descubierto era una "espiritualidad" de pura inmanencia, en la que los objetos virtuales, conjurados desde el útero de la tecnología, presentan al mismo tiempo tanto un aquí como un más allá.

La *vida* como pura inmanencia es singularmente accesible, se abre a nuestros micrófonos y nuestras cámaras, nuestros microscopios y nuestros escáneres. La *vida* está bajo nuestro control, aún si nosotros estamos bajo el control de la *vida*. Gestionamos lo que alabamos, administramos lo que veneramos. Ambos aspectos están en juego en la noción de responsabilidad por la *vida* que ha jugado un papel tan importante en los discursos de la pandemia y que parece ser la principal preocupación de mis dos interlocutores. Palaver dice, "nosotros somos responsables por la vida cada uno de nosotros. Es nuestra más alta responsabilidad, por la cual puede que tengamos incluso que sacrificar nuestras vidas". Dupuy sugiere "el riesgo de infectar a los propios seres queridos" como el estándar que debería aplicarse en nuestro propio comportamiento. Criticar ya sea la construcción ideológica de la pandemia o las medidas contraproducentes adoptadas contra ella es coquetear con la irresponsabilidad –la temeraria desconsideración por las vidas de otros que tanto Dupuy

como Palaver desaprueban y temen–. Pero la palabra *responsabilidad*, según Illich, es algo tramposa –es más fácil engancharse con la palabra que zafarse de ella–. El asunto clave para él es si la cosa de la cual se dice que soy responsable está a mi alcance, dentro de mis posibilidades y accesible a mi entendimiento. "La *responsabilidad* atrapa", dice Illich, atribuyendo al que se hace responsable algún poder imaginario –podría ser el poder de vencer al racismo, salvar la vida en el planeta o dar fin con la pandemia quedándose en casa–. Pero muy a menudo Illich dice que este poder "resulta ser falso". Y eso hace de la responsabilidad "la base ideal sobre la cual construir la nueva religiosidad de la que hablo, en nombre de la cual la gente se vuelve más que nunca administrable y gestionable".

No cuestionamos aquí ningún comportamiento que sea prudente, considerado o cortés. La preocupación de Illich tenía que ver con la ilusión, la grandiosidad moral y la confusión epistemológica. La última es particularmente importante en el caso presente. A pesar de su inmediata domesticación en miles de dibujos animados como un pequeño demonio puntiagudo y malévolo, poco se conocía sobre el SARS COV-2 cuando apareció al principio, y hay mucho que aún es debatible, incluidos sus orígenes, la mortalidad que ocasiona, su modo de transmisión y cuál es la mejor forma de prevenirlo y tratarlo. Al mismo tiempo empero, se ha enfatizado perseguir la "consistencia de los mensajes" y "seguir a *la* ciencia". Se ha considerado que esto requiere una censura efectiva, en primer lugar, para mantener fuera de las noticias al disenso científico completamente normal y, en segundo, para darles un aire de obviedad e invulnerabilidad a las que son en realidad precauciones científicamente dudosas. (Un ejemplo de lo primero es la marginación de expertos en salud pública discordantes como el ex jefe oficial médico de salud en Ontario, Richard Schabas y el ex principal de Manitoba Joel Kettner en Canadá. El mejor ejemplo de lo segundo es el

uso de mascarillas, descartadas como inútiles al comienzo de la pandemia, luego, sin ninguna evidencia adicional, de uso obligatorio e incuestionable). Esto crea una extraña situación en relación con la responsabilidad. La verdadera responsabilidad o "capacidad de respuesta" (*response-ability*) depende de una situación en la que sea capaz de responder y llegar a una apreciación práctica sobre qué hacer. Pero la pandemia, si bien muy real para aquellos que están enfermos, también se ha desarrollado en el ámbito de la hipótesis, modelo y metáfora. Esto quiere decir que a menudo la responsabilidad se ejerce no ante un prójimo real sino en relación con un perfil de riesgo. Este prójimo hipotético se queda, en efecto, para siempre. Y es así que, como dice Illich, somos "atrapados".

De qué manera somos atrapados queda mejor ilustrado por la idea de riesgo. Esta era la preocupación contemporánea que más inquietaba a Illich, quien la llamaba la "la ideología más importante que se celebra religiosamente hoy en día". La "conciencia del riesgo", decía él, es "una invitación a la autoalgoritmización intensiva", y como tal es "desencarnante". El punto clave es que el riesgo no pertenece a una persona individual –nadie sabe qué me pasará a mí como individuo–. Es un cálculo de la frecuencia con que un evento determinado ocurrirá en una población o clase que comparte algún atributo o conjunto de atributos –una predicción de lo que *podría* ocurrirle a alguien *como* yo–. El individuo es desplazado o desenfocado y reemplazado por un constructo matemático. Hablar de "mi riesgo" es, por tanto, mezclar lo que deberían ser dos maneras de hablar completamente distintas, e introducir una dimensión hipotética en mi propia carne. Illich se dio cuenta de este dilema a través del régimen legal alemán que obliga a las mujeres embarazadas someterse a la orientación genética, de tal modo que estén informadas acerca de los varios riesgos relacionados con sus embarazos, y a continuación realizar una elección

informada –tomar una decisión responsable – sobre cómo proceder. A Illich esto le pareció espantoso, particularmente cuando descubrió, a través de la investigación sobre estas sesiones de orientación genética de su amiga y colega Celia Samerski, que por lo general las mujeres tomaban erróneamente las aseveraciones sobre riesgos como afirmaciones atribuibles a sus propios embarazos.

El riesgo en su sentido coloquial es parte de la vida. Nadie podría caminar con seguridad hasta la tienda de la esquina sin alguna estimación de los posibles peligros en base a la experiencia del pasado. Sin embargo, cuando el riesgo es formalizado y matematizado ello define un nuevo tipo de orden social que el sociólogo alemán Ulrich Beck llamó "sociedad del riesgo" (*Risokogesellschaft*). En una sociedad de ese tipo ocurre una invasión sin precedentes de lo hipotético dentro de lo real. Esto se representa de dos maneras. La primera es que la modernidad avanzada en su conjunto es un riesgo gigante no controlado –un experimento científico en curso–. Descubriremos qué quiere decir tener "armas de destrucción masiva" acumuladas en todo el mundo después del hecho –el experimento continúa en proceso–. Lo mismo es cierto para ejemplos más domésticos como los teléfonos móviles o el internet, para mencionar solo dos tecnologías del cotidiano que actualmente están transformando la vida social de maneras completamente impredecibles. Este elemento de riesgo no controlado e incontrolable es intrínseco a una forma de vida en la que la constante innovación tecnológica se considera buena, necesaria e inevitable. "Cuando tú ves algo que es técnicamente atractivo", dijo el físico Robert Oppenheimer, en referencia a su papel ejecutivo en la creación de las armas nucleares, "tú sigues adelante y lo haces, y discutes sobre qué hacer con ello solo después que has tenido tu éxito técnico".

Me parece que este riesgo no controlado, universal

y apenas tolerable genera una compensación: una atención celosa a esos riesgos que aparentemente pueden controlarse. Esta es la segunda forma en que la sociedad del riesgo de Beck es representada –en nuestra preocupación por la seguridad, nuestra "tolerancia cero", nuestro constante escaneado en busca de "problemas" incipientes–. La "conciencia del riesgo" –"celebrada religiosamente", como dice Illich– es el complemento del riesgo no controlado. Este tipo de conciencia obliga a la gente a vivir fuera y más allá de su experiencia encarnada. También la obliga a dominar el futuro de una manera novedosa. Una vez que la probabilidad de una eventualidad no deseada ha sido establecida, se puede dar pasos para prevenir su ocurrencia –se acaba con el embarazo de riesgo, se instalan cámaras de seguridad, la seguridad se convierte en la promesa de cada institución. Se salta de la prudencia a la obsesión; "cuídate" se vuelve el nuevo saludo de despedida.

Por confesión propia, Illich vivía para las sorpresas. "Nuestra esperanza de salvación", les dijo a los que se graduaban de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en 1969, "descansa en dejarnos sorprender por el Otro. Aprendamos siempre a recibir más sorpresas. Decidí hace mucho guardar la esperanza por las sorpresas hasta el último acto de mi vida –es decir, en la muerte misma–. En la primera mitad de su trayectoria, percibió la rutinización de la caridad a través de las instituciones de servicio como la principal amenaza al espíritu de la sorpresa. Las instituciones de servicio reemplazan a los irregulares, espontáneos y poco fiables impulsos de la vocación personal con una respuesta garantizada. Creo que más tarde percibió la "conciencia del riesgo" de la misma manera. Un riesgo es una distribución probabilística en una población, no es una persona. Una persona invita al discernimiento –atención cuidadosa a una historia irrepetible– un riesgo es un algoritmo, una regla operativa que te dice qué hacer en un caso *como* este. Pero puede haber un mundo de diferencia entre *este* caso y un caso *como* este. La

sorpresa es el enemigo cuando se sigue una regla.

Esto no quiere decir que el riesgo no tenga su lugar apropiado en el mundo. Un actuario necesita un conocimiento preciso de la frecuencia de ciertos eventos desfavorables; un cirujano sería negligente si no sopesa los daños de una intervención versus los beneficios. Como muchas cosas en el pensamiento de Illich esta es una cuestión de grado, o equilibrio. En medicina, por ejemplo, se necesita preguntar si el conocimiento del riesgo complementa el conocimiento personal del paciente, o lo reemplaza, de modo que, en efecto, el paciente se convierte en el riesgo. La misma pregunta se aplica a las sesiones de orientación genética para mujeres embarazadas que impresionaron tanto a Illich a través de la investigación de Celia Samerski. ¿Sabe la mujer que está siendo orientada genéticamente la diferencia entre ella misma, y el riesgo que ella conlleva como miembro de una clase? Internalizar el riesgo es volverse, en efecto, alguna otra. Lo singular es reemplazado por lo general; lo posible cede su lugar a lo probable; la esperanza cede a la expectativa calculable. El riesgo se vuelve un problema cuando se desplaza de la posición de una forma de conocimiento limitada y parcial a una "ideología celebrada religiosamente".

El dios que rige el ámbito del riesgo es la *vida*. Se hace todo para aumentar, ampliar y salvar la vida. "Me he levantado cada mañana", dijo el otro día el Ministro de Salud británico Matt Hancock, como justificación de su conducta durante la pandemia, "y he preguntado, ¿qué debo hacer para proteger la vida?" Los intereses de la vida ordenan y supervisan la conciencia del riesgo. Los conceptos son parecidos en su generalidad. Ambos absorben lo particular y lo personal dentro de lo abstracto y sinóptico. Se atiende al riesgo, por último, a fin de conservar la vida.

Esta generalidad asombrosa y pasmosa hace de la *vida*, según Illich, una palabra plástica. Una palabra plástica es una

palabra que es toda connotación y ninguna denotación, una palabra que puede ir a cualquier parte y hacer de todo porque no está sujeta a límite alguno. Se trata de una luz desnuda, sin sombra, que nunca se apaga. Al principio Illich habló de esas palabras como "palabras ameba", un término que utilizó en *La sociedad desescolarizada* para aludir a un término "tan flexible" que puede encajar en "cualquier intersticio de [un] lenguaje". Cuando Illich encontró un espíritu afín en Uwe Pörksen, novelista y profesor de literatura alemana en la Universidad de Friburgo a quien Illich conoció en el Instituto de Estudios Avanzados (*Wissenschaftkolleg*) recién creado en 1980 en Berlín, ambos desarrollaron más este concepto bajo el nombre de palabras plásticas. Pörksen continuó elaborando sobre lo que habían empezado juntos y en 1988 publicó su libro *Plastikwörter: Die Sprache einer Internationalen Diktatur*, que fue traducido al inglés en 1995 como *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language* [Palabras plásticas: la tiranía de un lenguaje modular].

Las palabras plásticas son, entre otras cosas, palabras arrancadas del vernáculo y sometidas a lo que Illich llamó alguna vez una "limpieza científica". Ellas retornan luego al uso cotidiano con un perfume nuevo de experticia y el aspecto de los que usan una bata blanca. En la película *La leyenda del indomable* (*Cool Hand Luke*), cuando el "capitán" de la cuadrilla de prisioneros pronuncia la frase citada con frecuencia, "lo que aquí tenemos es…una falla en comunicar", la ironía depende de la naturaleza de la *comunicación* como una palabra plástica. Comunicar ya no es solo conectar, a la manera de un pasadizo comunicante que conecta; es comprometerse con un *proceso* que se puede estudiar y formalizar con precisión científica. Hablar de la comunicación es referirse a un dominio en el que un experto sabe, mejor que tú, cuándo te estás comunicando y cuando no. La palabra *información* pasa por una historia similar. Un antiguo término coloquial fue coop-

tado por la "ciencia de la información" y reconstruido como un asunto de la relación señal a ruido o de bits y bytes. Esto le daba a la palabra un aura o halo que mantenía en el lenguaje ordinario, de modo que cuando la *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* introdujo la "Radio de Información", invocaba una "comunicación" desde este plano más elevado de la ciencia. La CBC no solo te estaba diciendo algo –estaba entregando *información* –. Las palabras plásticas se convierten en recursos profesionales. Con la *comunicación* o el *desarrollo*, los expertos pueden construir y hacer el mundo tan maleable como las palabras mismas.

Fue con "una sensación de repentino espanto", por tanto, que Illich se dio cuenta que la *vida* podría haberse vuelto una palabra plástica –una palabra que funciona principalmente como un recurso profesional. Compartió su reticente intuición con Uwe Pörksen y descubrió que su viejo amigo estaba aún más consternado que él ante la idea que la palabra vida pudiera volverse parte de esta categoría indignante:

> Cuando fui donde Pörksen y le dije, "Uwe, pienso haber encontrado la peor de ellas, la *vida*; se quedó muy silencioso. Por primera vez… tuve la impresión de que se enojó conmigo, se desilusionó de mí. Estaba ofendido. Y tuvo que pasar entre seis a nueve meses antes de que pudiéramos hablar de nuevo sobre ese tema, porque es simplemente impensable que algo tan precioso y bello como la vida pudiera actuar como una palabra ameba.

El espanto de Pörksen era un indicador del propio espanto de Illich.

Como resumen entonces, antes de pasar a nuestras actuales circunstancias: Illich consideraba a la *vida* como un ídolo, un dios hecho por el hombre en cuya forma nos adoramos nosotros mismos, mientras al mismo tiempo generamos algo sagrado que ordena y justifica nuestra manipulación de lo viviente. Afirmó que la *vida* se había vuelto el objeto y ancla de

"una nueva etapa de la religiosidad" –una mayor perversión de la comprensión bíblica de la vida como consecuencia del aliento de Dios–. Él pensaba que la vida se había vuelto algo "sustantivo" –una materia a ser cuantificada y conservada, un recurso a ser aumentado y administrado–. Sostenía que la idea de cada uno como persona –un ser irrepetible e inescrutable impregnado por una "historicidad misteriosa"– estaba siendo reemplazada por conceptos sistémicos en los que la individualidad se disuelve. Y creía finalmente que la palabra *vida* se había vuelto el sitio de un ominoso "colapso conceptual de la frontera" entre "modelo y realidad" y entre "proceso y sustancia". Este colapso se expresa en nuestra idea de que, al convertirnos en protectores, campeones y devotos de la vida, hemos tocado sin residuo, reserva o rodeo a *la vida misma*.

¿De qué manera es todo esto pertinente en la situación presente, y respecto a los temores de mis interlocutores de que Illich esté siendo temerariamente mal interpretado por los que "dudan del covid", según Dupuy? Veamos: lo que más me impresionó al comienzo de la pandemia fue la ciega certidumbre con la que todo el mundo actuó desde el momento en que la OMS pronunció la mágica palabra *pandemia* el 11 de marzo de 2020. En otros tiempos, la sabiduría convencional en salud pública hubiera aconsejado prudencia y calma, y apuntado las medidas operativas a poner en cuarentena a los enfermos y a proteger a los más vulnerables. Pero, ahora, repentinamente, todo el mundo entendió, por lo visto, que el miedo era nuestro amigo y aliado, y que el mayor número de gente posible debía ser puesta en *confinamiento* durante el mayor tiempo posible, y de que cualquier política que sugiriera adaptarse a esta nueva realidad era temeraria –"La inmunidad de rebaño es una gran estrategia, si no te importan los millones de muertos", decía un titular en Canadá–. Para mi asombro, el feo término *confinamiento* (*lockdown*), anteriormente usado principalmente en prisiones y ocasional-

mente en escuelas, cambió completamente su valencia y se volvió una expresión de nuestra mutua preocupación. Otras sorpresas, para mí, fueron que el "sistema de atención en salud" tenía que ser "protegido" de una situación de emergencia sanitaria y que debíamos "seguir la ciencia" religiosamente mucho antes de que hubiera cualquier ciencia relevante a seguir. A los epidemiólogos como John Ionannidis de Stanford se los ignoró cuando advirtieron de un "fracaso" equivalente a "saltar al precipicio", si se adoptaban medidas draconianas antes de que nadie supiera con seguridad cuán contagiosa y cuán letal era en realidad la nueva enfermedad.

Rápidamente se volvió difícil cuestionar los costos del confinamiento. El disenso científico, aunque difundido, quedó mayormente barrido bajo la alfombra. "Canadá está en Guerra" declaró un principal periódico canadiense, y el disenso, en tiempos de guerra, puede ser interpretado como traición. En Canadá un distinguido grupo de veteranos de la salud pública, entre ellos varios ex jefes médicos oficiales de salud, emitió un pronunciamiento haciendo un llamado a restituir "un enfoque equilibrado" en el que los daños sean inteligentemente contrapuestos a los beneficios y que no sea una sola enfermedad el único punto focal y preocupación de la política gubernamental. Este pronunciamiento fue ignorado, y los que lo firmaron fueron mayormente excluidos de los medios principales. Se estableció una censura efectiva. Cuando tres epidemiólogos eminentes –Sunetra Gupta, Jayanta Bhattacharya y Martin Kulldorf –produjeron la Declaración de Great Barrington, abogando a favor de una política de lo que llamaron "protección enfocada" en lugar de la cuarentena universal, su intervención ni siquiera fue cubierta por los principales medios canadienses, a pesar del hecho de que todo lo que proponían era la restitución del *statu quo ante* en el sistema de salud pública. Más recientemente el Colegio de Médicos de Ontario, la instancia médica gobernante en mi

provincia natal, ha amenazado "investigar" y con acciones "disciplinarias" contra los médicos que cuestionen los programas de vacunación, la utilidad de las mascarillas y el distanciamiento social, y el valor de los confinamientos. Ya sea en los medios, en la medicina o en el gobierno solo se pueden expresar opiniones aprobadas.

Lo que más me ha preocupado en esto ha sido la intensificación de aquello que escribí en otras ocasiones sobre el mito de la Ciencia, con el que aludo esencialmente a la idea de que hay una institución llamada Ciencia que habla con una sola voz incuestionable. Cuando alguien habla de "*la* ciencia", se está comprometiendo con este mito. Por su naturaleza, las ciencias son plurales, disputables y sujetas a revisiones desorganizadas e inacabables. Hablar de ellas en singular, y luego tratar a esta fusión como un oráculo, conlleva dos consecuencias profundamente perniciosas. Primero se anticipa a las políticas. Ni los daños supuestamente evitados por los confinamientos ni los daños supuestamente creados por ellos son información definitiva. No existe una ciencia que pueda determinar cualquiera de ellos con precisión porque, en ambos casos, estarán implicados algunos supuestos de partida cuestionables, junto con muchos otros modelos y escenarios probables. (No hay que insistir en lo que debería ser obvio, pero la misma sociedad no puede estar, al mismo tiempo, confinada y no confinada, que es la única manera en que podría realizarse una comparación "científica" definitiva entre dos condiciones). Esta es la razón por la cual las personas, en este momento, están tan apasionadamente, y yo diría muy legítimamente, divididas acerca de la efectividad de los confinamientos –están partiendo de supuestos diferentes, comparando casos disimiles, y realizando concesiones y ajustes variados a estas disimilitudes–. Imaginar que la "Ciencia" pudiera poner en orden todo esto es, en mi opinión, una fantasía reaccionaria y destructiva. La política es la esfera de la elección

moral –la esfera en la que se toman apropiadamente las decisiones sobre cómo vamos a vivir–. La ciencia simplemente no te puede decir si es correcto dejar que una persona muera sola a fin de evitar algún riesgo de diseminar el contagio necesariamente hipotético. "Seguir [lo que dice] la ciencia" en casos donde la ciencia no es aplicable o no existe es, por tanto, una fórmula para el vaciamiento completo de la política. Desde hace mucho tiempo que estoy de acuerdo con la opinión del filósofo de la ciencia francés Bruno Latour quien sostiene que solo podemos volver a "aterrizar" a través de un renacimiento de la política, y que este resurgimiento dependerá de una redefinición de las ciencias que rompa el dominio de la Ciencia mistificada sobre la política. Me parece, en consonancia con ello, que el reforzamiento del mito de la Ciencia que la pandemia ha hecho posible es algo que debe combatirse.

La segunda consecuencia perniciosa de este mito es el daño a las ciencias mismas. A pesar de la censura que se ha ejercido durante la pandemia, cualquier persona de mente abierta y con una variedad de fuentes habrá notado aún los desacuerdos fundamentales que desde un inicio dividieron a los epidemiólogos, virólogos, especialistas en enfermedades contagiosas y expertos en salud pública. Estos desacuerdos son normales, predecibles y saludables. Lo que no ha sido nada saludable es la ficción de unanimidad proclamada por aquellos que pretenden conocer y seguir a *la* ciencia. En mi opinión, esta ficción perpetúa una imagen falsa de las ciencias en la que se suprime todo tipo de variabilidad, contingencia y sesgo. Peor aún, su fundamentalismo engendra la propia anticientificidad a la que pretende oponerse. Las ciencias prosperarán y servirán sus propios propósitos solo cuando dejen de ser confundidas con la voz de la Naturaleza o la voz de Dios.

Las políticas de cuarentas masivas que muchos gobiernos adoptaron durante el último año han sembrado varias consecuencias amenazantes y fatídicas. Derechos básicos

han sido eliminados; medios de subsistencia se han perdido; se ha incurrido en una deuda enorme; las relaciones sociales se han vuelto virtuales; se ha alentado el pánico; las artes han sido diezmadas; y cientos de otros problemas se han agudizado como resultado de una focalización exclusiva en COVID-19. Si acaso los beneficios de estas políticas han compensado estos costos es, como he tratado de mostrar, una cuestión política. Es obvio que tengo dudas de que así sea y me inclino a pensar que la opción de "protección enfocada" propuesta por la Declaración de Great Barrington habría sido el más sensato curso a seguir. Pero lo que realmente me preocupa es porqué algo tan claramente debatible no puede, aparentemente, ser debatido. Y es aquí donde pienso que Illich vuelve a entrar en escena.

Tan atrás como los 1980 inclusive, Illich había detectado entre sus contemporáneos una nueva "topología conceptual y perceptual", un nuevo "espacio mental", decía él, que era "no continuo con el pasado". Me parece que los conceptos detrás de los cuales la mayoría se ha alineado en el último año pertenecen a esta nueva topología. Son destacables los conceptos del riesgo, la seguridad, la gestión y, sobre todo, la *vida*. Hemos estado "practicando" y aculturando estas ideas por muchos años, pero tenía que venir una pandemia para evidenciar cuán completamente han quedado establecidas. La cuarentena masiva se vio como un paso necesario e incuestionable, y no como una novedad debatible, porque la *vida* debe protegerse, el *riesgo* debe evitarse, la *seguridad* debe ser lo más importante. El daño a los estilos de convivialidad establecidos y hábitos culturales arraigados era soportable porque estos nuevos conceptos determinan cada vez más nuestra forma de vida –ellos *son* nuestra cultura–. La idea del distanciamiento y la evasión como ejercicios de solidaridad funcionó porque ya suficientes individuos se consideraban como componentes de un sistema inmunológico –una vida a escala am-

pliada– más que como integrantes de una sociedad o cultura política. El contraste era marcado en el caso de la devoción religiosa. Los rituales de la salud y seguridad fueron aprobados y alentados; los rituales religiosos fueron excluidos. Los primeros eran tratados como consensuados, sustantivos y obligatorios; los segundos como cascara opcional que puede practicarse únicamente a gusto del Estado.

Cuando Illich escribió sobre la "desescolarización", promoviéndola como el *sine qua non* de cualquier "movimiento de liberación humana", su argumento no era la eliminación de las escuelas sino el "retiro de su reconocimiento oficial" (*disestablishment*) –una expresión que la mayor parte de sus lectores hubiera asociado enteramente con la religión–. El gobierno, dice la primera enmienda de la constitución estadounidense, "no hará ninguna ley respecto al establecimiento de la religión". La propuesta de Illich fracasó porque pocos compartían su opinión de que la escolarización debiera considerarse "el establecimiento de una religión" en vez de algo más utilitario. La religión solo se hace perceptible como tal únicamente cuando se vuelve una creencia opcional, más que una forma de vida obvia. Fue precisamente a fin de marginarla y contenerla que la religión se redefinió como una creencia, en vez de una práctica, durante el período moderno.

Mi punto es que el "nuevo estado de religiosidad" de Illich, centrado en torno a la *vida*, no es fácil de percibir como tal. Podría serlo para los miembros devotos de las confesiones abrahámicas que colocan el centro de la vida en Aquél en quien "vivimos y nos movemos y tenemos nuestro ser" y por tanto no ven a la preservación y prolongación de la vida sea como un bien exclusivo o como el bien superlativo. Pero para aquellos que viven dentro de los horizontes de esta religiosidad, necesariamente debe asumir la forma de algo obvio e incuestionable. Cuando me tocó hablar hace poco con un cirujano que me quería

convencer de someterme a una cirugía que creía podría ampliar mi "expectativa de vida", tuve la impresión de que simplemente no podía entender cómo pudiera ser posible cualquier otro objetivo –una búsqueda de la "hora [apropiada] de mi muerte", por ejemplo –. Para alguien como él, la vida es un bien sin restricciones, la muerte un mal sin atenuantes. Lo que se torna sagrado se vuelve intocable e incuestionable. Delante de la *vida*, esa cosa preciosa que debemos salvar a toda costa, todos deben inclinarse y guardar silencio. Esto permite que el gobierno continúe como si estuviera *detrás de un velo*. La imagen es precisa por cuanto era un velo lo que ocultaba de la vista al Sanctasanctórum en el Segundo Templo de Jerusalén. Era este velo que los Evangelios dicen se rompió en dos en la hora de la Crucifixión, profanando el sagrado antiguo y abriendo la puerta, a la larga, a nuestra reverencia por la vida en sí misma, la vida como su propio dios.

Para resumir: creo que durante el año pasado se ha vuelto a la gente menos competente, menos consciente, más temerosa y más inclinada al ritualismo y el sentimentalismo. Mitos fatales, como el mito de *la* Ciencia, han resultado fortalecidos. Más gente ha quedado relegada al nuevo proletariado cuyo único trabajo restante es recolectar bonos del Estado, consumir entretenimiento y aplaudir por encargo. El Foro Económico Mundial ha sido alentado a diseñar su Gran Reseteado mediante el cual el capitalismo monopólico finalmente se volverá indistinguible del socialismo. Las hegemonías profesionales incapacitantes han sido fortalecidas. Las conversaciones difíciles –sobre la vacunación del Covid, digamos– se han vuelto más difíciles aun, si no imposibles, debido a una polarización irresponsable. El soberano que autoriza estos desarrollos es la *Vida*, junto con las divinidades menores auxiliares que lleva su séquito, como ser el riesgo, la seguridad y la gestión. Creo que Illich vio venir esto, y que me mantengo en

sintonía con él en este punto.

Conté la historia de un joven que se preguntaba, después de escuchar a Illich dar su conferencia sobre *Némesis Médica*, si la propuesta de Illich era "dejar que la gente se muera". Estoy seguro que la misma pregunta se me podría ahora hacer a mí. Es una pregunta curiosa porque implica que depende de mí, o Illich, o cualquier otro al que se pueda desafiar de esta forma, permitir o no permitir la muerte. Antiguas imágenes de las Parcas las muestran tejiendo y cortando la tela del destino, asignando a cada uno al nacer un pedazo intransferible. La imagen contemporánea es contraria. Nada determina nuestros destinos excepto la vigilancia de las instituciones que nos protegen. Viviremos hasta que, al terminar el tratamiento, se nos "deja" morir. La desmesura de esta imagen refleja como un espejo el fatalismo de la anterior. Illich era un hombre del "camino medio", lo cual no significaba para él la mediocridad sino el filo de la navaja de un discernimiento constantemente renovado. No abogaba por dejar deliberadamente que la gente se muera, como tampoco abogaba por mantenerla con vida a cualquier costo. Nada nos dirá por adelantado dónde debiera quedar el equilibrio, pero ciertamente nunca lo encontraremos si prohibimos toda discusión.

La idea de que la vida y la muerte, o el bien y el mal, están indisolublemente enmarañados en el mundo no es una idea nueva, y no debería ser controvertida. Los cristianos tienen la parábola del grano y la cizaña para enseñarles esto; los budistas tienen la idea de que el bien y el mal son de "origen codependiente". Solo en una civilización completamente entregada a lo que Illich llamó alguna vez "una compulsión por hacer el bien" esta idea requeriría defenderse o explicarse. Tener que defenderla, sin embargo, coloca al defensor en la extraña posición de hablar pareciera en favor de cualquier mal que la última guerra está supuestamente

erradicando. Creo que la opinión de Illich, expresada en su maravilloso ensayo "Investigación por la gente", era que se puede trazar una aproximada pero clara distinción entre una tecnología que "remedia" ciertos males e inconvenientes de la condición humana y la tecnología que apunta, en los términos de Francis Bacon, al "dominio sobre la naturaleza". Esta idea de una tecnología como remedio que él atribuye a Hugo de San Víctor, es lo más cerca que llegó, y lo más cerca que pensó le era posible llegar, a especificar un principio de lo bastante, lo suficiente o el límite, sobre el que pueda fundarse una filosofía de la tecnología post prometeica y post baconiana. Cualquiera sea la manera en que se formule este principio, con seguridad estipulará cosas que no pueden hacerse así como cosas que sí se pueden hacer. Por el contrario, la *vida* ejerce una demanda ilimitada. Se trata del bien repetitivo, deslumbrante e interminable que la cristiandad corrompida le transmitió a la modernidad. El pasado año fuimos tras él como nunca antes y sin advertir nunca el parteaguas que estábamos cruzando. Para "salvar vidas" hemos puesto al mundo de cabeza, aceptando la censura y el control social invasivo, abandonando a los ancianos e inmolando a los marginales de la economía. Hemos permitido una mayor mitificación de lo que ya estaba por demás mitificado –la Ciencia como un oráculo concebido como inmaculado e infalible–. Hemos dado paso a la virtualización intensiva, el pánico creciente y el daño a la convivialidad. Mi pregunta es: ¿valió la pena?

Para concluir entonces: tanto Wolfgang Palaver como Jean-Pierre Dupuy han sugerido que Illich está siendo o bien malinterpretado o empujado demasiado lejos. En respuesta, he intentado sacar las consecuencias de la denuncia que hizo Illich de la vida como un ídolo y mostrar que lo que su "olfato, su intuición y su razón" le decían hace 40 años ha sido revelado y realizado más completamente

en el entretanto. Lo que me gustaría saber ahora es dónde se encuentra la diferencia con mis interlocutores. ¿Piensan ellos que estoy equivocado sobre el daño provocado el año pasado? ¿Consideran que estoy malinterpretando a Illich? ¿O piensan que el propio Illich está equivocado?

–

Every issue of Conspiratio is hand stitched and bound by Claudia Gutlich and Carmen Sapede in *De Etser Encadernação*, which is part of *De Etser Atelier*, a collective art studio committed to the art of printmaking techniques since 1998, located in the rural area of São José dos Campos in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. *De Etser* is a gathering place for different generations of artists dedicated to a variety of techniques to *convivere* and work.

–

First print run: 50 copies

Papers: Polen Bold 70 g/m^2, Keaykolour 120 g/m^2, Triplex Supremo 250 g/m^2 (cover)

To request the print version of this and other volumes for a nominal postage and handling fee, send an email to: conspiratio@afterillich.net